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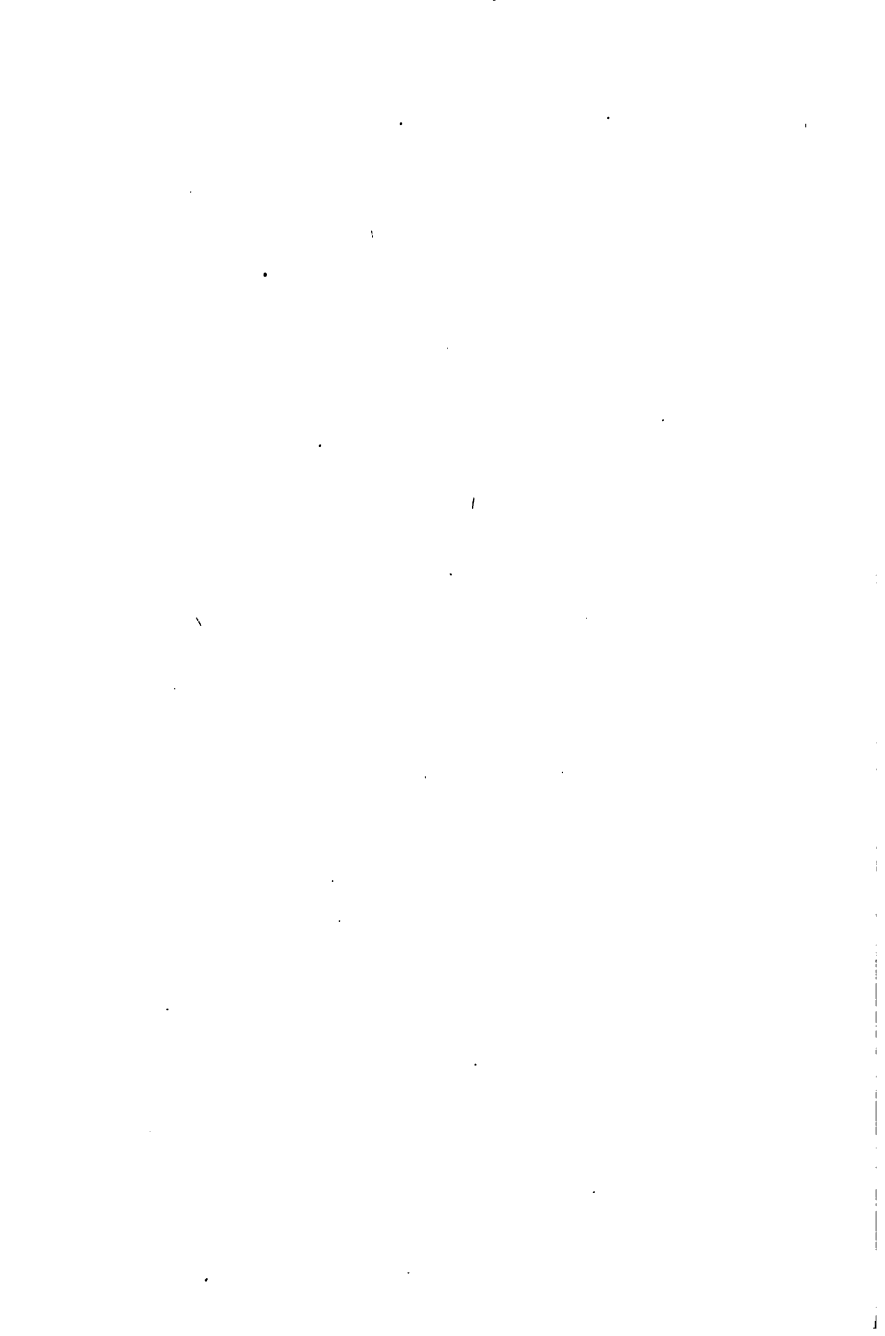
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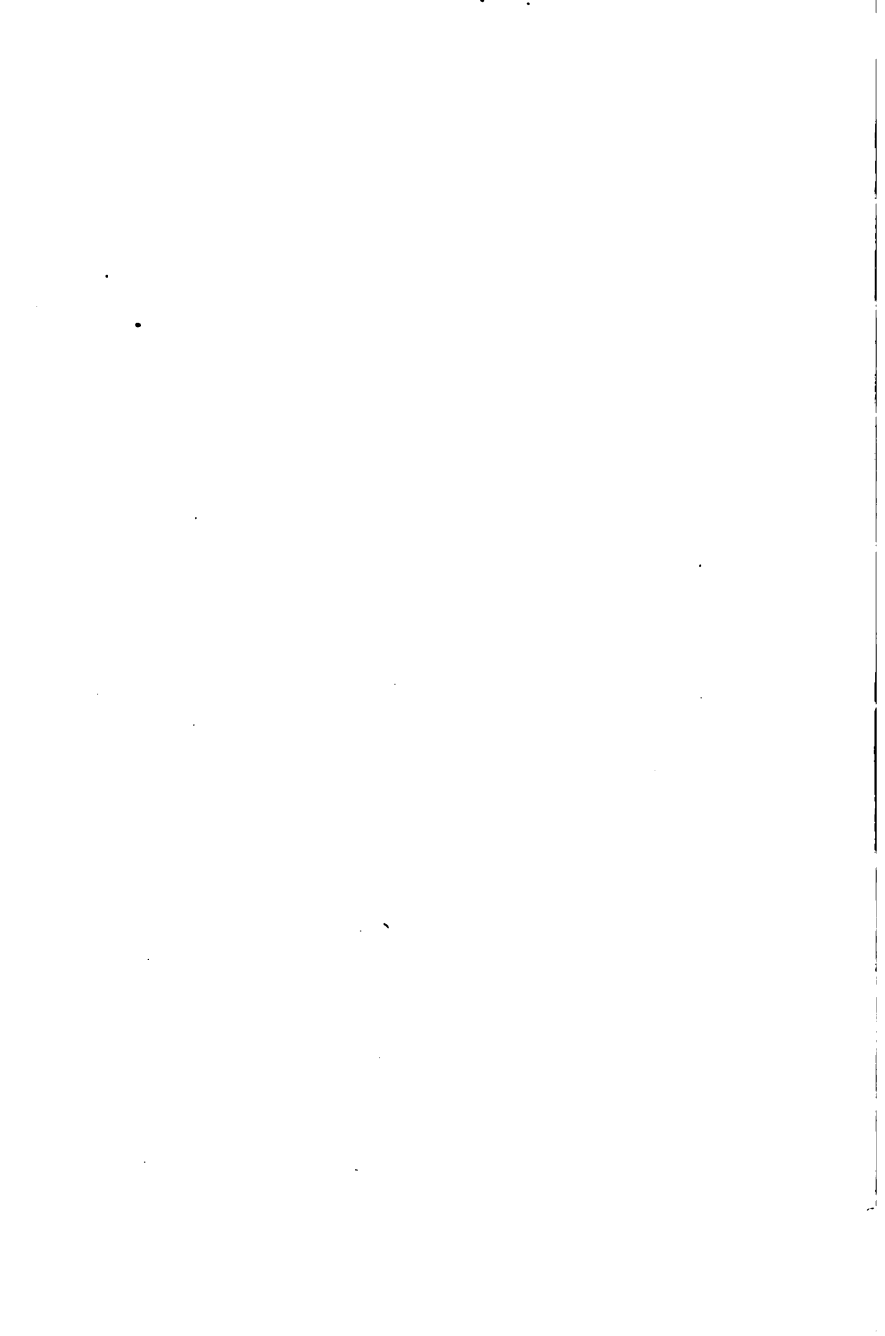


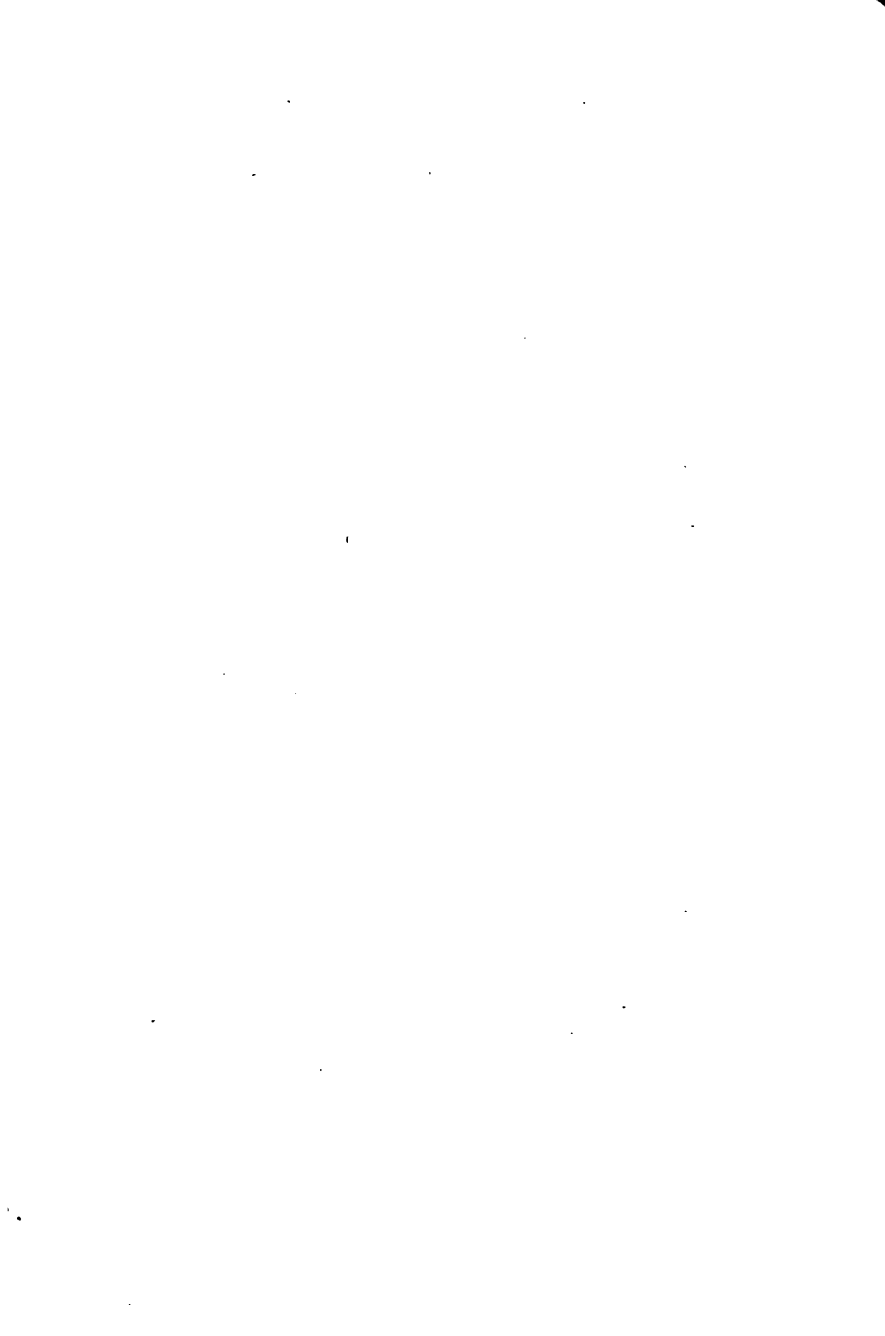


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HISTORICAL ROMANCES.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

VOL. II.



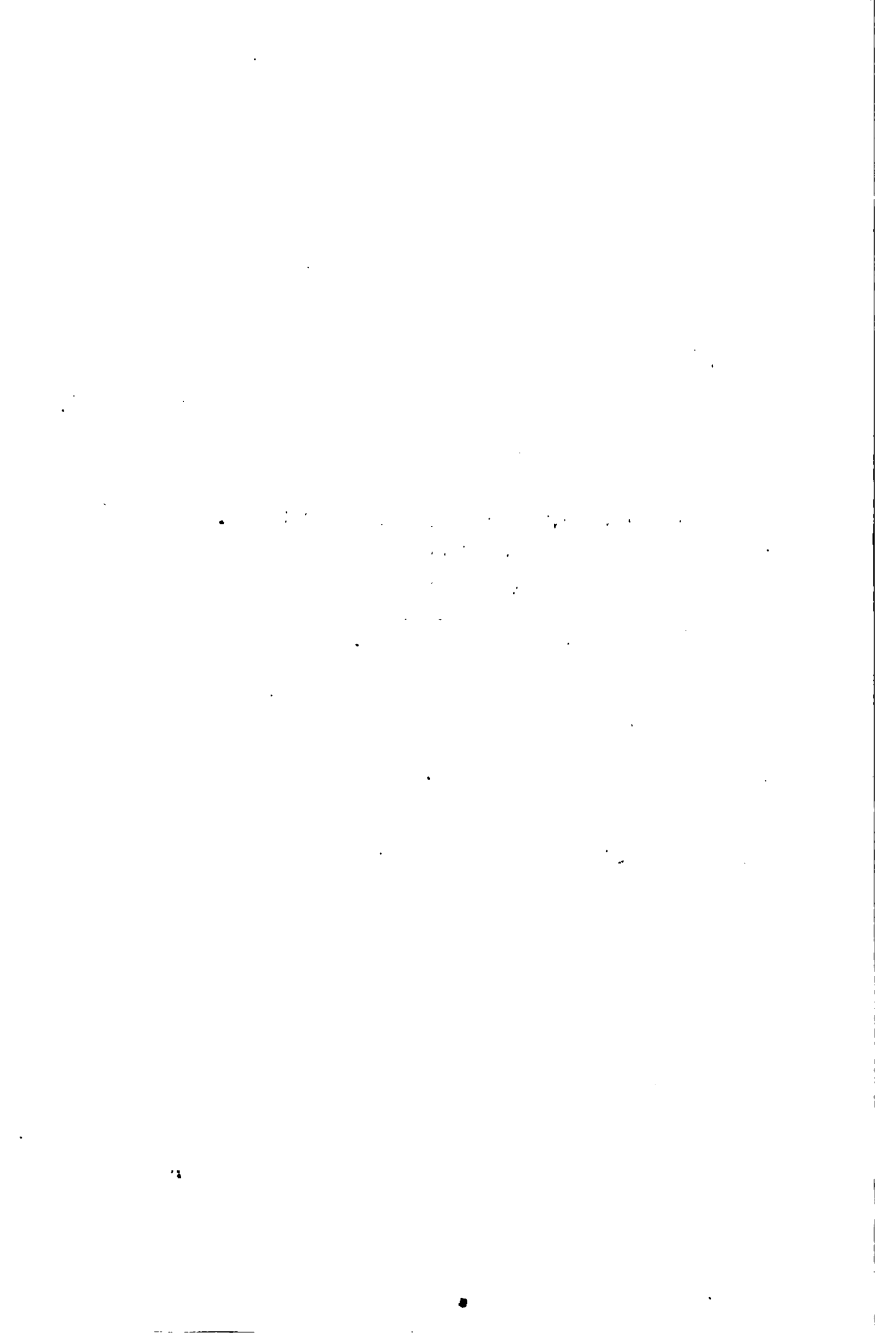




"HE THOUGHT HE HEARD STEPS
BEHIND HIM."

Drawn and etched by E. Van Muyden.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL, II. *Frontispiece.*



THE
SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
THE CORSICAN BROTHERS.

BY
ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

BOSTON:
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.
1894.

41530,338 (2)



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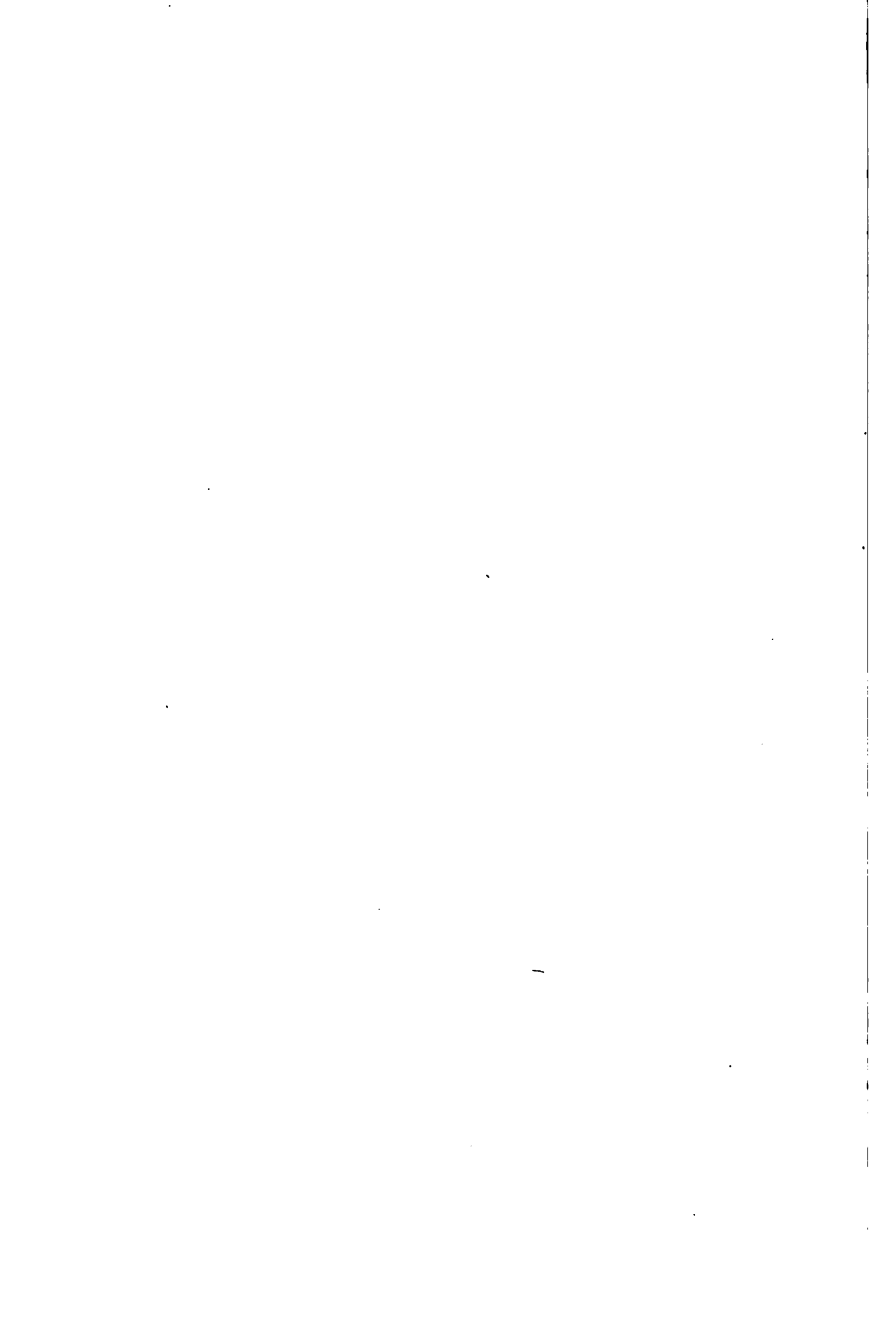
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THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN JEAN OULLIER PROVES THAT WHEN THE CORK IS DRAWN THERE IS NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN TO DRINK THE WINE.

A FEW moments later, Gaspard, Louis Renaud, and the Marquis de Souday entered the room.

Spying Petit-Pierre, deeply buried in meditation and prayer, they stopped on the threshold; and the Marquis de Souday, who was humming a song as a salutation to the dawn, checked himself respectfully.

But Petit-Pierre had heard the door open; he rose, and said to the new-comers, —

“Come in, gentlemen, and forgive me for interrupting your slumbers; but I had important resolutions to make known to you.”

“It is for us to ask your royal Highness’s pardon for having failed to anticipate your wishes, and for sleeping when we might be of service to you,” said Louis Renaud.

“A truce to compliments, my friend,” Petit-Pierre interposed; “those appurtenances of triumphant royalty are ill suited to a time when it is sinking anew.”

“What do you mean?”

"I mean, my dear, kind friends," replied Petit-Pierre, turning his back to the fire, while the Vendéans formed a half-circle about him, — "I mean that I have summoned you to give you back your oaths and to say farewell."

"Give back our oaths! Say farewell!" cried his youthful partisans in amazement. "Can it be that your royal Highness thinks of leaving us?"

"It cannot be!" they exclaimed, exchanging glances of incredulous wonder.

"Yet it must be."

"And why?"

"Because my friends so advise me; because they do more, — they beseech me."

"Who, pray?"

"Those whose discernment, intelligence, devotion, and fidelity are absolutely beyond suspicion."

"But on what pretext? For what reasons?"

"It seems that the Royalist cause is in a desperate plight, even in Vendée; that the white flag is no longer aught but a sorry rag which France spurns; that it is impossible to find, in all Paris, twelve hundred men who will make a disturbance in the streets for a crown or two; that it is untrue that we have sympathizers in the army, untrue that there are any friends of ours in the Government, untrue that the Bocage is ready a second time to rise as one man to defend the rights of Henri V!"

"But once more I ask," interrupted the Vendean noble, who had momentarily exchanged a name illustrious in the first war for that of Gaspard, and who was unable longer to restrain his feelings, "from whom do these counsels proceed? Who speaks of Vendée with such assurance? Who measures our devotion so accurately that he can say, 'Thus far will they go, and no farther'?"

"Divers Royalist committees, whom I need not name to you, but whose opinion we have to give weight to."

"Royalist committees!" cried the Marquis de Souday. "*Parbleu!* I know all about them; and if Madame chooses to follow my advice, we will do with their opinions what the late M. le Marquis de Charette did with the opinions of the Royalist committees of his day."

"What did he do, my good Souday?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"My deep respect for your royal Highness," replied the marquis, with superb *sang-froid*, "unfortunately does not permit me to particularize further."

Petit-Pierre smiled in spite of her gloomy thoughts.

"True," said he; "but we are no longer living in those good old days, my poor marquis. M. de Charette was an absolute sovereign in his camp, while the Regent Marie Caroline will never be aught but a strictly constitutional regent. The projected movement can succeed only if there is perfect unanimity of thought and feeling among all those who desire its success. Now, can it be said, I ask you, that this unanimity exists, when on the very eve of battle the general is notified that three fourths of those upon whom he thought he could rely will not be on hand at the appointed place of meeting?"

"Eh, what matters it?" cried the Marquis de Souday; "the fewer those who do turn up there, the greater will be their glory."

"Madame" (Gaspard addressed Petit-Pierre with the utmost gravity) "at a time when perhaps you were not contemplating returning to France, your friends came to you and said, 'The men who overthrew King Charles X. are kept at a distance by the new government, and re-

duced to impotence; the ministry is so constituted that you would have only a few changes, or none at all, to make in it; the clergy, an unmovable, stationary force, will support with all its influence the re-establishment of royalty in accordance with divine right; the judicial offices are still held by men who owe everything to the Restoration; the army, essentially obedient to orders, is commanded by an officer who has said that in politics one must have more than one flag; the people, whose supremacy was proclaimed in 1830, has fallen under the yoke of the most stupid and idiotic of aristocracies. Come, then,' they added. 'Your return to France will be a veritable repetition of the return from Elba; the populace will throng around you to salute the descendant of our kings, whom the country demands the privilege of proclaiming!' On the faith of these words, you came, madame; and when you appeared among us, we rose in your support. Now, I maintain that your withdrawal would be disastrous to our cause, and disgraceful to us; that it would be an arraignment of your political intelligence and of our personal lack of influence."

"Yes," said Petit-Pierre, who, by an extraordinary transition, found herself defending an opinion which broke her very heart; "yes, all that you say is true. Yes, they promised me all that; but it is neither your fault nor mine, my noble friends, if madmen mistook insane hopes for reality. Impartial history will record that when the day came that I was accused of being a bad mother, — and I have been so accused, — I replied as I ought, 'Here I am, ready for the sacrifice!' It will record, too, that you, my faithful adherents, have hesitated less about your devotion to me in proportion as my cause seemed more and more hopeless; but it is a

point of honor with me not to put your devotion to the proof uselessly. Let us talk common-sense, my friends; let us make figures, — that's the surest way. How many men do you think we have at our disposal at this moment?"

"Ten thousand at the first signal."

"Alas!" said Petit-Pierre, "that is a large number, but not enough. King Louis Philippe, besides the National Guard, has four hundred and eighty thousand unemployed troops ready for service."

"But what about the defections and the officers who have thrown up, or will throw up, their commissions?" the marquis objected.

"Very well," rejoined Petit-Pierre, turning to Gaspard; "I place my destiny and my son's in your hands. Tell me, assure me, on your honor as a gentleman, that we have two chances in our favor against ten adverse, and far from ordering you to lay down your arms, I remain among you to share your danger and your fate."

At this straightforward appeal, — not to his feelings, but to his honest conviction, — Gaspard bent his head, and said nothing.

"You see," continued Petit-Pierre, "your reason is not in accord with your heart; and it would be almost a crime to take advantage of a chivalrous attachment which good sense rejects. Let us, therefore, waste no more time in discussing what has been decided; and, perhaps, decided for the best. Let us pray God to send me back to you in better times and under more favorable conditions, and let us think now only of flight."

Beyond question, the gentlemen recognized the necessity of this decision, although it was so little in accord with their sentiments. For when they saw that the duchesse's mind was apparently fixed, they made no

remonstrance, contenting themselves with turning aside to hide their tears.

The Marquis de Souday paced up and down the room by himself, with an impatience which he did not take the trouble to conceal.

"Yes," continued Petit-Pierre, bitterly, after a pause, — "yes, some have said, like Pilate, 'I wash my hands of it;' and my heart, strong against danger and in face of death, weakened; for it could not coolly look forward to the responsibility for failure, and blood wantonly shed, which they throw upon me in advance. Others —"

"Blood which flows for the faith will never be shed in vain!" said a voice from the corner of the fireplace. "God has said it, and humble though he be who speaks, he does not fear to repeat what God has said. Every man who has faith, and dies for his faith, is a martyr. His blood will make fruitful the soil which receives it, and hasten the harvest time."

"Who says that?" cried Petit-Pierre, sharply, rising to his full height.

"I," was the laconic reply of Jean Oullier, as he rose from the stool on which he was sitting and entered the circle of noblemen.

"You, my good fellow!" cried Petit-Pierre, overjoyed to receive reinforcements when he thought everybody had abandoned him. "So you do not share the opinion of these gentlemen from Paris? Come, come near and speak. In these times Jacques Bonhomme is never out of place, even in a council of kings."

"I am so little inclined to see you leave France," replied Jean Oullier, "that if I had the honor of being gentle born, as these gentlemen are, I would have closed the door before this and would have said to you, placing myself in your path, 'You shall not leave this room!'"

"And your reasons? I long to hear them. Speak, speak, good Jean!"

"My reasons! That you are our flag; and so long as one soldier remains, though he were the last of the army, it is his duty and privilege to hold it firmly aloft, until death makes it his winding-sheet."

"What more, what more, Jean Oullier? Speak on! You speak more than well."

"My reasons! That you are the first of your race who ever came to fight among those who are fighting for it; and it will be a bitter shame for you to withdraw before the sword is drawn."

"Go on, go on, Jacques Bonhomme!" said Petit-Pierre, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"My last reason," pursued Jean Oullier, "is that your withdrawal before the battle will resemble flight; and we cannot afford to let you fly."

"But," interposed Louis Renaud, alarmed by the attention with which Petit-Pierre was listening to Jean, "the defections of which we have been informed take away all hope of success from the uprising. It will be a *fiasco*, pure and simple."

"No, no, the man is right!" cried Gaspard, who had acceded most regretfully to the reasoning of Petit-Pierre. "Even a *fiasco* will be better than the nothingness in which we shall otherwise be buried. A *fiasco* is a date, at least; it will have a place in history. And the day will come when the people will have forgotten everything except the gallantry of those who made the attempt. If it leaves no trace on the throne, it will leave traces in the memory of the people. Who recalls the name of Charles Edward without being reminded of his *fiascos* of Preston-pans and Culloden? Ah, madame, I am very eager, I confess, to do what this brave peasant advises."

.

"There is another consideration which makes your views all the more sensible, Monsieur le Comte," rejoined Oullier, with an assurance which proved that these questions, although they may have seemed far above his capacity, were, nevertheless, very familiar to him. "It is this: that the principal object aimed at by her royal Highness in her flight — the object to which she proposes to sacrifice the future of the monarchy which has been intrusted to her care — will still be defeated."

"How 's that?" Petit-Pierre inquired.

"As soon as Madame has left France, — as soon as the Government knows that she is far from our shores, — the persecutions will recommence, and with increased violence and pitilessness, as we shall be much less formidable. You are rich, you gentlemen. You, too, can make your escape by flight; you will have vessels waiting for you at the mouth of the Loire or the Charente; you are at home everywhere, so to speak. But we poor peasants are bound, like the goat, to the soil from which we derive our sustenance; and we prefer death to exile."

"And your conclusion from all that, good Oullier?"

"My conclusion, Monsieur Petit-Pierre," replied the Vendean, "is that when the cork is drawn we must drink the wine; that we have taken up arms; and that, having done so, we must fight without wasting time in calculations."

"Then let us fight!" cried Petit-Pierre, in a high state of excitement; "the voice of the people is the voice of God! I have faith in the voice of Jean Oullier."

"Let us fight!" echoed the marquis.

"Yes, let us fight!" exclaimed Louis Renaud.

"Very well. What day shall we appoint for the uprising?" Petit-Pierre asked.

"Why, isn't it decided that it shall be the 24th?" said Gaspard.

"Yes; but these gentlemen have countermanded the order."

"What gentlemen?"

"The gentlemen from Paris."

"Without notifying you?" cried the marquis. "Do you know that men have been shot for less than that?"

"I have forgiven them," said Petit-Pierre. "Besides, they who did it are not fighting-men."

"Oh, but this postponement is a very great misfortune!" said Gaspard, in an undertone; "and if I had known —"

"What, then?" demanded Petit-Pierre.

"I might, perhaps, not have acceded to the peasant's opinion."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre. "You heard what he said, my dear Gaspard,—the cork is drawn, and we must drink the wine. Let us drink it gayly, then, messieurs, even though it be of that vintage with which the Sire de Beaumanoir refreshed himself at the battle of Les Trente. Come, Marquis de Souday, try to find pen, ink, and paper for me in the farmhouse where your future son-in-law has treated me so hospitably."

The marquis hastened to find what Petit-Pierre requested; but as he was rummaging in the drawers of the wardrobe and commode, pulling over the farmer's clothes and linen, he took occasion to squeeze Jean Oullier's hand, and say to him,—

"Do you know that you have been talking pure gold,

old boy, and that never a blast of your horn rejoiced my heart as the 'boots and saddles' you just blew?"

Having found what he sought, he placed them before Petit-Pierre, who dipped a stumpy pen in the ink-bottle and wrote these words, in his large, firm, bold hand:—

MY DEAR MARÉCHAL,—I remain among you; be good enough to join me.

My reason for remaining is that my presence has already compromised a large number of my faithful servants; therefore it would be rank cowardice for me to desert them at such a crisis. Furthermore I hope that, notwithstanding the unfortunate counter-order, God will give us the victory.

Adieu, Monsieur le Maréchal; do not you offer your resignation, since Petit-Pierre withholds his.

PETIT-PIERRE.

"And now," said he, folding the letter, "what day shall we decide upon for the uprising?"

"Thursday, the 31st May," suggested the Marquis de Souday, thinking the earliest possible date the best. "That is, of course, if you all agree."

"No, no," said Gaspard. "Pardon me, Monsieur le Marquis, but I think it will be better to select the night of Sunday and Monday, the 3d and 4th June. Sunday, after High Mass, in all the parishes the peasants are accustomed to assemble on the church steps, and the captains will then have an excellent opportunity to communicate the orders without arousing suspicion."

"Your acquaintance with the customs of the country-people is wonderfully useful, my friend," said Petit-Pierre, "and I am of your opinion. Let the order go for the night of the 3d and 4th June."

Thereupon he at once set about drawing up orders for the following day.

Having resolved not to leave the Western provinces, and to intrust my person to their long and well established fidelity, I rely upon you, monsieur, to take all necessary measures in preparation for the appeal to arms which will take place during the night of the 3d and 4th June.

I make my appeal to all men of spirit and heart. God will help us to save our fatherland. No danger, no weariness will destroy my courage ; I shall not fail to make my appearance at the first muster of our forces.

This document Petit-Pierre signed:—

MARIE CAROLINE, *Régente de France.*

“ At last the die is cast ! ” he cried. “ Now we must conquer or die ! ”

“ And now, ” rejoined the marquis, “ even if I should receive twenty counter-orders on the 4th June, I shall sound the tocsin ; and, faith — Oh, well, after us, the deluge ! ”

“ Yes ; but we must look out for one thing, ” said Petit-Pierre. “ This ” — showing his order — “ must be delivered to the divisional commanders by a sure hand, and at once, to neutralize the bad effects of the injunctions from Nantes. ”

“ Alas, ” said Gaspard, “ God grant that the wretched countermand may have made as much speed as we shall make with our new orders ! God grant that it may have reached the country districts in time to paralyze the earlier movement and store up all its energy for the second ! I am greatly afraid that it may not be so ; I fear that many brave fellows may fall victims to their courage and their isolation. ”

“ For that very reason we must not lose an instant, messieurs, ” said Petit-Pierre ; “ and we must use our legs while awaiting the opportunity to use our arms. ”

Do you, Gaspard, make it your duty to notify the divisional commanders of Upper and Lower Poitou. M. le Marquis de Souday will do the same in the Retz and Mauges districts. Do you, my dear Louis Renaud, come to an understanding with your Bretons. Ah, but who will undertake to carry my despatch to the maréchal? He is at Nantes; and your faces are a little too well known, gentlemen, for me to think of exposing one of you to the danger of such a commission."

"I will go," said Bertha, who had heard the sound of voices in the alcove, where she and her sister were sleeping, and had risen. "Is n't that one of the privileges attaching to my duties as aide-de-camp?"

"Yes, to be sure. But about your costume, my dear child," replied Petit Pierre; "it might not be to the taste of the good burghers of Nantes, charming as it is in my eyes."

"Therefore my sister must not be the one to go to Nantes, madame," said Mary, coming forward, in her turn; "I will go, if you please. I will put on peasant's clothes, and will leave your royal Highness your first aide-de-camp."

Bertha undertook to insist; but Petit-Pierre whispered in her ear, —

"Stay here, dear Bertha. We will talk of M. le Baron Michel, and make some fine plans, which I am sure will meet his approval."

Bertha blushed, bent her head, and allowed her sister to take possession of the despatch.

CHAPTER II.

WHEREIN IS EXPLAINED HOW AND WHY BARON
MICHEL HAD CONCLUDED TO GO TO NANTES.

WE have said that Michel had left Banlœuvre; but we have not, so it seems to us, dwelt sufficiently upon the reasons for that freak and the circumstances which accompanied it.

For the first time in his life Michel had resorted to stratagem, and had been guilty of something like duplicity.

The profound emotion following upon the words of Petit-Pierre and upon Mary's unexpected declaration, which scattered the hopes he had cherished so complacently at Master Jacques' abode, left him completely stupefied.

He realized that the inclination which Bertha so freely manifested for him separated him from Mary more completely than her own aversion could have done. He reproached himself bitterly for having encouraged her by his silence and his idiotic timidity. But in vain did he belabor himself; he could not find in his heart the necessary force of will to cut short a complication which was making havoc with an attachment dearer to him than his life. He had not the resolution to bring about a frank, categorical explanation; and he looked upon it as an altogether impossible thing to say to the lovely maiden, to whose intervention some hours before it was more than likely that he

owed his life, "Mademoiselle, you are not the one whom I love."

So it was, although he had not lacked favorable opportunities to open his heart to Bertha during the evening,—for she was very uneasy about his wound, which would not have made her wink if it had been her own, but which she insisted upon dressing with her own hand; so it was that he remained in that plight, whose discomforts increased with every minute.

He tried hard to speak to Mary, but she took as much pains to avoid him as he to get near her; and he had to give up the idea of making her his mouthpiece, as he for a moment thought of doing.

Besides, those fatal words, "I do not love you!" rang incessantly in his ears like a funeral knell.

He seized upon a moment when no one, not even Bertha, was looking at him, to withdraw—to fly, rather—to his own room.

He threw himself upon the straw bed which Bertha's white hands had prepared for him. But with his brain whirling more madly than ever, and his heart more and more agitated, he soon rose again, bathed his burning face with a wet towel; and clinging to the towel as a restorative, he began to think about taking advantage of his sleeplessness to pursue an idea.

After cudgelling his brains for not less than three quarters of an hour, the idea came to him. It was this: that what cannot be spoken aloud may yet be written; and Michel made up his mind that that expedient would be about on a level with his decision of character.

But, in order to avoid embarrassment altogether, it was essential that he should not be present at the reading of the letter, which was to reveal to Bertha the secret of his heart.

Timid souls not only dislike to blush themselves, but they are equally averse to making other people blush.

The result of Michel's reflections, then, was that he would leave Banlœuvre, — temporarily, of course; for when the status of affairs was once clearly drawn, and the ground once cleared, there would be nothing to prevent his returning to take his place beside his beloved.

For why should the Marquis de Souday, who had given him Bertha's hand, refuse to give Mary's, when he learned that it was Mary, not Bertha, with whom Petit-Pierre's protégé had fallen in love?

There could be no possible pretext for such a refusal.

Greatly encouraged by this prospect, Michel, with base ingratitude, threw away the towel, to which, or to the tranquillity which its cool touch had restored to his brain, he perhaps owed the bright idea he was about to put in execution. He went down into the farmyard, and started to lower the bars across the cart-road.

But just as he had taken out the upper one and laid it along the wall, and was about to do the same with the second, he noticed a commotion in a pile of straw under a shed which lay to the right of the bars, and from it emerged a head, which he recognized as Jean Oullier's.

"*Peste!*" he ejaculated, in his most crabbed tones, "you are stirring early, Monsieur Michel!"

At that moment the clock on the neighboring village church was striking two.

"Have you some message to deliver, pray?" continued Oullier.

"No," replied the young baron, for he felt as if the Vendean's keen eye were piercing to the very depths of his soul; "but I have a terrible headache, and I thought I would see if the night air would n't relieve it."

"All right; but I warn you that sentinels are posted outside, and if you happen not to be provided with the countersign, something may happen to you."

"To me?"

"Damnation, yes! to you just the same as to another; at ten paces, you know, it would be hard to distinguish that you are the master of the house."

"Do you know the countersign, Monsieur Jean?"

"Of course I do."

"Tell me what it is."

Jean shook his head.

"That's the Marquis de Souday's business," said he. "Go up to his room; tell him that you want to go out, and for that purpose need the countersign, and he will tell you,—that is, if he thinks best to do so."

Michel did not choose to adopt that course, and he stood irresolute, with his hand on the second bar. Jean Oullier, meanwhile, buried himself again in his straw.

Completely disconcerted, the baron took his seat upon an overturned watering-trough beside the inner gate of the farmyard.

There he had leisure to continue his meditations; for although the bunch of straw did not move, it seemed to Michel as if an opening had been made in the thickest part of it, through which he could see the glitter of something which might well be Jean Oullier's eye.

There was no hope of deceiving the eye of such a watch-dog as that; but fortunately, as we have said, meditation was profitable to our hero.

The question for him to solve was how to get away from Banlœuvre decorously. He was still seeking for an excuse when the first rays of dawn appeared on the horizon, gilded the roof of the farmhouse, and brightened with their reflection the sombre panes of its narrow windows.

Little by little Michel's surroundings began to show signs of life: the lowing of the cattle for their feed was heard; the bleating sheep, impatient for the pasture, thrust their gray muzzles through the openwork door of their fold; the fowls left their perches and scattered about cackling over the dung-heaps; the pigeons left their cote, and flew out upon the roof, there to warble their everlasting hymn of love; while the more prosaic ducks, drawn up in a long line at the cart-path gate, filled the air with their discordant music, intended no doubt to express their surprise at finding the gate closed when they were in such haste to flounder in the horse-pond.

At these diverse noises, forming in combination the morning concert of a well-managed farm, a window just above the improvised bench on which Michel was sitting was softly opened, and Petit-Pierre's head appeared.

But he did not see Michel; his eyes were fixed on the sky, and he seemed completely absorbed, whether by his thoughts, or by the grandeur of the spectacle which lay before him.

The least observant eye, especially that of a princess, little used to seeing the sun rise, would have been dazzled by the darts of flame which the king of day sent abroad over the land, where they made the damp and tremulous leaves of the trees to glisten like millions of precious stones, while an invisible hand gently lifted the vapory veil which lay over the valley, disclosing one by one, like a modest maiden, its charms and its splendors.

For some moments Petit-Pierre abandoned himself to rapt contemplation of this wondrous picture; then, leaning his head upon his hand, he murmured sadly,—

“Alas! in all the destitution of this poor house, its inmates are more to be envied than I!”

This phrase was the stroke of the magic wand which caused light to shine in upon the young baron's brain, and implanted there the idea, or the excuse, which he had been vainly seeking for two hours.

He had straightened himself up against the wall at the noise of the opening window; he kept perfectly quiet and did not leave his position until the sound of the window being closed indicated that he might leave his place without being seen.

He then went straight to the shed.

"Monsieur," said he to Jean Oullier, "Petit-Pierre just came to the window."

"I saw him," said the Vendean.

"He spoke; did you hear what he said?"

"It was none of my business, so I did n't listen."

"I was nearer to him than you, and I heard without meaning to."

"Well, what if you did?"

"I learned that our guest finds his present domicile unpleasant and inconvenient; in short, it lacks those conveniences which his aristocratic bringing up makes absolutely necessary to his comfort. Can you not—if I furnish the money, of course—undertake to procure these things for him?"

"Whereabouts, please?"

"*Dame!* at the nearest town or village,—Légé or Machecoul."

Jean Oullier shook his head.

"Not to be thought of!" said he.

"Why not, pray?"

"Because, to purchase luxuries at this moment in the places you mention, where every motion of certain persons is watched, would inevitably arouse dangerous suspicions."

"Could you not go as far as Nantes, then?" asked Michel.

"By no means," replied Jean Oullier, dryly; "the lesson I got at Montaigu has made me prudent, and I won't leave my post again; but," he continued in a slightly satirical tone, "why don't you go to Nantes yourself? — you say you need the fresh air to cure your headache."

Finding his stratagem so successful, Michel felt a blush mounting to the whites of his eyes; but he trembled as the moment approached when his ruse was to be put in execution.

"You may be right," he faltered; "but I, too, am afraid."

"Nonsense! a valiant fellow like you ought to fear nothing," said Jean Oullier, shaking himself clear of the straw, and walking toward the gate, as if to give the young man no time to reflect.

"But —" Michel began.

"What! again?" exclaimed Jean, impatiently.

"Will you agree to explain my motive in going to M. le Marquis, and offer my excuses to —"

"To Mademoiselle Bertha?" sneered Jean. "Never fear."

"I will return to-morrow," said Michel, passing through the gate.

"Oh, don't put yourself out! Take your time, Monsieur le Baron. If not to-morrow, why, the next day," retorted Oullier, closing the gate behind the young man.

The sound of the gate being secured oppressed Michel's heart sadly. He thought less just then of the embarrassing position he wished to escape than of the separation from his beloved.

It seemed to him that the half-worm-eaten gate was of

solid bronze, and that in the future he should find it standing always between Mary and himself.

And so, instead of leaving the spot, he sat down by the roadside and began to weep. There was a moment when, if he had not dreaded the raillery of Jean Oullier, — whose ill-will toward himself he could not misunderstand, inexperienced though he was, — he would have knocked at the gate and returned to the house, just to see the gentle Mary once again. But an impulse — we were going to say of false shame, let us say, rather, of true shame — restrained him and he walked away, without any clear idea where he was going.

As he was following the Légé road, a noise of wheels made him turn his head. He saw the diligence which ran from Sables d'Olonne to Nantes close upon him. He was conscious that his strength, exhausted by loss of blood, slight as was the wound he had received, would not permit him to go a long distance on foot.

The sight of the coach put an end to his wavering. He signalled it to stop, climbed into one of the compartments, and a few hours later was set down in Nantes.

Not till he reached that place did he feel his grievous position in its entirety.

Accustomed from childhood to live upon the lives of others, to obey a will other than his own, maintained in the same moral slavery by the substitution which had taken place in his young manhood, — having, so to speak, simply changed masters when he left his mother for the object of his love, — freedom was so novel to him that he failed to realize its charm; while his loneliness, on the other hand, had become almost intolerable.

Hearts deeply wounded are nowhere more cruelly

alone than in the midst of busy towns. The busier and more thronged the streets, the greater the solitude. The sense of isolation amid the crowd, the contrast between the happiness or indifference of those whom they meet and their own grief and anguish overwhelm and crush them.

This it was which happened to Michel.

Finding himself *en route* for Nantes, almost against his will, he hoped to find there some distraction from his sorrow; but it was there, on the contrary, that it became keener and more poignant than ever. Mary's face was always before him, however great the throng. He felt as if he must meet her in every woman who came toward him, and his heart was torn between bitter regret and hopeless longing.

In this frame of mind he thought of nothing but returning to his room in the inn at which the diligence had set him down. He shut himself up there, and did as he had done when he left the farm, — he began to weep.

He thought of returning on the instant to Banlœuvre, throwing himself at Petit-Pierre's feet and begging him to be his intermediary with the sisters. He blamed himself for not having done it in the morning, and for having yielded to his fear of wounding Bertha's proud spirit by taking him into his confidence.

This line of thought naturally brought him around to the object, or the pretext, of his journey, — that is to say, the purchase of certain luxuries, which would explain his absence to the satisfaction of those not deeply interested in him. Then, having completed his purchases, he must write the terrible letter, which was the only real reason of his visit to Nantes.

He thought best, on the whole, to begin with the

letter; and having once come to that determination, he set to work without loss of time and indited the following, upon which he shed as many tears as it contained words:—

MADemoisELLE, — I ought to be the happiest of men, and yet my heart is broken; and yet I ask myself if death would not be preferable to my present suffering.

What will you think, what will you say, when this letter tells you what I can no longer conceal without showing myself altogether unworthy of your kindness? And yet it needs the remembrance of all your goodness, it needs the certainty of the nobility and generosity of your heart, it needs above all the thought that it is the being you love best in all the world who separates us, to give me courage for this step.

Yes, mademoiselle, I love your sister Mary; I love her with all the strength of my heart; I love her so that I have neither wish nor power to live without her! I love her so dearly that at the very moment when I am guilty toward you of what a less lofty character than yours might consider a dastardly insult, I stretch out my hands to you in supplication, and I say to you: "Let me hope to earn the right to love you as a brother loves his sister!"

Not until the letter was folded and sealed did Michel begin to consider how he could get it into Bertha's hands.

He could not think of intrusting it to any one at Nantes. It would be too hazardous for the messenger if he were faithful, or for him who employed the messenger if he were a traitor. But Michel might go back into the country, find a peasant in the outskirts of Machecoul upon whose discretion he could rely, and wait in the forest for the reply, upon which his future depended.

This was the course he decided upon. He passed the

balance of the day in making the different purchases he had in mind, put all the articles in a portmanteau, and postponed to the following day the purchase of a horse, which would be essential to him if he was, as he hoped, to continue the campaign he had begun.

The next day, about nine o'clock, Michel, with an excellent Norman beast between his legs, and his valise on behind, started to return to the Retz district.

CHAPTER III.

WHEREIN THE EWE-LAMB FALLS INTO A TRAP,
MISTAKING IT FOR THE SHEEP-FOLD.

It was market-day, and there was a great crowd of rustics in the streets and on the wharves of Nantes. When Michel reached the Pont Rousseau, his passage was literally blocked by an unbroken line of heavy wagons loaded with grain, carts full of vegetables, horses, mules, peasants, — male and female, — all of whom had in their baskets, on their pack-saddles, or in their tin vessels, the goods they were bringing for sale to the townspeople.

Michel's impatience was so great that he did not hesitate to plunge into this dense mass; but as he was urging his horse forward, he spied, coming from the opposite direction, a young woman, the mere sight of whom made him tremble with excitement.

She was clad, like the other peasants, in a petticoat with red and blue stripes, a hooded cloak, and a common-looking cap; but notwithstanding her humble costume, her resemblance to Mary was so striking that the baron could not restrain a cry of surprise.

He tried to retrace his steps; but, unluckily, the confusion caused in the crowd when he stopped his horse gave rise to such a tempest of oaths and shouts that he lacked the courage to defy them. He allowed his steed to go forward, raging internally against the slow progress which so many obstacles imposed upon him; but he had no sooner crossed the bridge than he

leaped to the ground and looked about for somebody to whom he could intrust his horse, turning around at the same time to make sure that his eyes had not deceived him, and cudgelling his brains to think why Mary could have come to Nantes.

At this moment a snuffling voice, like those of the beggars of all nations, asked alms of him.

He turned sharply about, for it seemed as if the voice were not altogether unfamiliar to him.

He then saw, leaning against the last stone of the Pont Rousseau, two personages, whose faces were too nearly unique not to be engraved on his memory. They were Aubin Courte-Joie and Trigaud the Vermin, whose partnership, for the moment, seemed to have no other object than to make what could be made out of the compassion of the passers-by; but who, in all probability, were there with some purpose not altogether unconnected with the political and perhaps the business interests of Master Jacques.

Michel hurried to where they were stationed.

"Do you recognize me?" he asked.

Aubin Courte-Joie winked.

"Kind sir," he said, "take pity on a poor wagoner who had both legs cut off by his wagon-wheels, on the hill above the Saut de Bauge."

"Yes, yes, my good fellow," said Michel, understanding.

He drew near as if to bestow alms on the poor wagoner, and slipped a piece of gold into Trigaud's huge paw.

"I am here by command of Petit-Pierre," he whispered to the two beggars, — the true and the false. "Look out for my horse for me a few minutes; I have important business."

The cripple nodded his assent. Baron Michel threw the rein over his arm, and darted away in the direction of the town.

Unfortunately it was little less difficult for a pedestrian than a horseman to pierce the throng. In vain did Michel take the upper hand and compel his timid disposition to act on the offensive; in vain did he try to use his legs, slip into everything that looked like an opening, and take endless risks of being crushed beneath the loads of hay and cabbages. He had at last to resign himself to take his place in the line, and move with the stream; so that the young peasant clearly had a long lead on him when he reached the spot where he first saw her.

He shrewdly imagined that she was likely to have gone toward the market-place with her companions; consequently, he took that direction himself, staring at all the country-women he met with an eager curiosity which drew forth many jocose remarks, and came near involving him in a quarrel or two.

Not among them, however, did he find her whom he was seeking.

He went through the market-place and the adjoining streets, but failed to detect anything which recalled the graceful form of the Pont Rousseau.

Completely discouraged, he had relinquished all hope of success and was directing his energies to returning to the place where he had left his horse when, as he turned the corner of the Rue du Château, he saw, not twenty paces away, the red-and-blue striped petticoat and the gray linen cap which had so strongly aroused his interest.

The gait of the person who wore this unpretentious costume was, for all the world, Mary's graceful gait.

It was her own slender and delicate figure which he could trace beneath the folds of the coarse stuff in which she was wrapped. The graceful curves of no neck but hers could make her rustic head-gear seem so charming a frame for her face. Lastly, the thick coils of hair, which protruded beneath that head-gear, were formed of the same fair locks which went to the composition of those lovely blond tresses Michel had so often admired.

There could be no mistake about it. The young country-woman and Mary were one and the same; and Michel was so profoundly convinced that this was so that he did not dare to meet her face to face, as he had done in other instances, but contented himself with crossing the street.

Indeed that manœuvre was all-sufficient to prove to him that he was not mistaken.

What was Mary doing at Nantes? Why, coming to Nantes, had she assumed that disguise?

Michel propounded those questions to himself, but was unable to solve them. And he was on the point, after making a violent effort over himself, of deciding to accost her when, as he was opposite Number 17, Rue du Château, he saw her push against the door of that house; and as it was not locked, she entered the hall, closed the door behind her, and disappeared.

Michel hurried to the house, but found the door closed and locked.

He stood upon the porch, in intense and painful bewilderment, at a loss what to do, and wondering if he had been dreaming.

Suddenly he felt a light touch on his arm; his mind was so far away from his body that it made him jump. He turned about and found himself confronted by the notary, Lorient.

"What! you here?" the latter asked, in tones indicative of great surprise.

"Pray, what is there surprising in my being at Nantes, Master Lorient?" Michel demanded.

"Be careful! Don't speak so loud, and don't plant yourself in front of that door as if you proposed to take root there; that's my advice."

"There, there! What fly is stinging you now, Master Lorient? I knew that you were cautious, but not to such a point as this."

"One can never be too cautious. Let us talk as we walk along; that's the way to escape notice."

Wiping his perspiring brow with his handkerchief, he continued, —

"Come, I am in danger of compromising myself horribly again!"

"I swear to you, Master Lorient, that I have n't the slightest comprehension of what you mean," said Michel.

"You don't understand what I mean, wretched boy? Why, don't you know that your name is included in the list of suspects, and that orders for your arrest have been issued?"

"Well, let them arrest me!" retorted Michel, testily, trying to lead the notary back to the house where Mary had vanished.

"Ah, let them arrest you, indeed! You take the news very lightly, on my word, Monsieur Michel. Oh, well, that's the philosophical way. I must tell you, however, that this same news, which seems so unimportant to you, produced such an effect on your mother that I should have set out to hunt you up as soon as I returned to Légé, if I had not happened on you here at Nantes."

"My mother!" cried the youth, whom the notary

had shrewdly touched on a soft spot. "Pray, what has happened to her?"

"Nothing, Monsieur Michel. And, thank God, she is as well as any one can be whose mind is tortured with anxiety and whose heart is torn with grief; for I ought not to conceal from you that such is the moral condition of Madame your mother."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* what is this you tell me?" said Michel, with a sigh that was almost a groan.

"You know what you were to her, Monsieur le Baron. You cannot have forgotten the care which she expended upon you in your youth, the solicitude with which she encompassed you even after you had reached the age at which one begins to escape from a mother's hands. Imagine, then, what torture she must feel to know that you are exposed every day to such terrible perils as those which beset your path. I ought to tell you that it was my duty to advise her of what I judge your intentions to be. And that duty I performed."

"Oho! And, pray, what did you tell her, Master Lorient?"

"I told her, in so many words, that I thought you were deeply in love with Mademoiselle Bertha de Souday—"

"This is too much!" exclaimed Michel. "This fellow, too!"

"And that," the notary continued, without heeding the interruption, "in all likelihood you contemplated marrying her."

"What response did my mother make?" Michel inquired, with evident anxiety.

"*Parbleu!* what all mothers say when one speaks to them about a marriage which does n't meet their views. But, come now, let me question you a bit myself, my

young friend. My position as notary of both families ought to entitle me to some influence with you. Have you thought well on what you are doing?"

"Do you share my mother's prejudice?" demanded Michel. "Do you know anything injurious to the good name of Mesdemoiselles de Souday?"

"By no manner of means, my young friend," replied Master Loriot, while Michel was gazing uneasily at the window of the house he had seen Mary enter, — "by no manner of means. On the contrary, I consider those two girls, whom I have known from their cradles, the purest and most virtuous in the province, — and that, you understand, notwithstanding the scandalous tales some evil tongues have invented, and notwithstanding the absurd sobriquet with which they have been honored."

"How does it happen, if that is so," said Michel, "that you, too, disapprove of my acts?"

"My young friend," replied the notary, "just remember that I offer no advice; but I think it my duty to recommend you to observe the greatest prudence. You will need to expend thrice as much energy to attain what might seem, from one standpoint, to be — pardon the expression — rank nonsense, as would be necessary to renounce an attachment which is wholly justified by the qualities of these young ladies, as I am far from denying."

"My dear Monsieur Loriot," who, when his mother was not by, was glad to burn his ships behind him, "the Marquis de Souday has been gracious enough to promise his daughter's hand to me; so there is no going back on that."

"Oh, that indeed! That's a different matter," said Master Loriot. "If you have reached that point, I have but one thing to advise, and one thing to say. It

is that a marriage entered into against the will of the parents is a serious step. Persist in your purpose, by all means; but go and see your mother. Don't give her the right to complain of your ingratitude, but strive to wean her from her unjust prejudice."

"Humph!" grunted Michel, feeling the justness of these suggestions.

"Come," urged Lorient, "promise me that you will do what I ask."

"Yes, yes; all right," replied the baron, in great haste to get rid of the notary; for he thought he could hear a noise in the hall, and feared that Mary would come out while they were talking.

"Very well," said Lorient. "Consider, too, that you will be safer at La Logerie than elsewhere. The credit of Madame your mother is your only hope of escaping the consequences of your conduct. You have been doing many foolish things lately, young man, which no one dreamed you capable of. Have n't you?"

"I admit it," said Michel, impatiently.

"That's all I wanted. A sinner who confesses is half penitent. There, now, I will leave you; I must start by eleven o'clock."

"Are you returning to L  g  ?"

"Yes, with a young lady who is to be brought to me at my hotel, immediately, and to whom I am to give a seat in my cabriolet. Otherwise, I should be only too glad to offer you the seat."

"But you will go half a league out of your way to do me a favor, won't you?"

"Most assuredly; with the greatest pleasure, my dear Monsieur Michel," replied the notary.

"Then just go to Banl  uvre and hand this letter to Mademoiselle Bertha, I beg you."

"All right. But for God's sake," ejaculated the notary, nervously, "be careful how you hand it to me! You continually forget our circumstances, and your carelessness frightens me to death."

"Indeed, you don't stand very still, dear Monsieur Lorient. When anybody passes us, you jump off the sidewalk as if they had the plague about them. What's the matter? Come, tell me, Notary."

"The matter is that I would willingly exchange my practice at this moment for the most wretched practice in the departments of La Sarthe or L'Eure; that I am so worked up all the time that my days will be shortened if it continues much longer. Look you, Monsieur Michel," continued the notary in an undertone, "they have actually crammed four pounds of powder into my pockets! And I tremble, every step I take. Every cigar that comes anywhere near me puts me in a fever. So farewell! Go back to La Logerie, I implore you."

Michel, whose suffering, like Master Lorient's, was momentarily increasing, allowed the latter to depart. He had got all that he wanted from him, — namely, the certainty that his letter would be carried to Banlœuvre.

When the notary was out of sight, his eyes naturally returned to the house, and were fixed upon it more intently than ever. They were especially attracted to a window, where he thought he could detect the raising of the curtain and the indistinct outline of a face looking at him through the glass.

He thought that the maiden was watching him because of his persistence in standing in front of the house. So he walked away toward the wharf, and hid behind the corner of a building in such a way as to lose nothing of what took place in Rue du Château.

Soon thereafter the door opened, and the young woman reappeared. But she was not alone.

A young man, dressed in a long frock and affecting rustic manners, accompanied her. Quickly as they hurried by Michel, he had time to notice that the person in question was young, and that his features were of a distinguished cast, which contrasted strangely with his costume. He saw that he was laughing and joking with Mary, on a footing of equality, and that she smilingly refused to give him the basket she was carrying on her arm, of which he probably offered to relieve her.

The thousand and one serpents of jealousy began to bury their fangs in his heart; and being convinced, especially in view of what Mary had whispered in his ear, that these simultaneous disguises were the cloak of a love affair as well as a political intrigue, he rushed away toward the Pont Rousseau at headlong speed, taking a course directly opposite to that taken by the other young people.

The crowd was much less dense, and he had no difficulty in crossing the bridge; but when he reached the other side he looked in vain for Courte-Joie, Trigaud, and his horse, — all three had vanished.

Michel was so upset that it never occurred to him to seek them in the neighborhood; after what the notary had told him, it was hazardous for him to enter a complaint, which might lead to his own arrest, to say nothing of revealing his dealings with the two beggars.

He made up his mind therefore to travel on foot, and took the road to Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.

Cursing Mary, bewailing the treachery of which he was the victim, he thought only of following Master Lorient's advice, returning to La Logerie, and throwing

himself into the arms of his mother,— a line of conduct which the sight he had just seen did much more to bring about than all the notary's representations.

He had got as far as Saint Colombin, when he was accosted by two gendarmes who had come up behind without attracting his notice.

"Your papers, monsieur!" the brigadier demanded, after he had examined him from head to foot.

"My papers?" repeated the astounded Michel, to whom that demand was addressed for the first time in his life. "Why, I have none."

"And why have you none?"

"Because I did n't suppose I needed a passport to go from my château to Nantes."

"What is your château?"

"The Château de la Logerie."

"And your name?"

"Baron Michel."

"Baron Michel de la Logerie?"

"Just so; Baron Michel de la Logerie."

"In that case, if you are Baron Michel de la Logerie, I arrest you."

Without more ado, before the young man even thought of escaping (which would have been quite possible, considering the lay of the land), the brigadier took him by the collar, while the gendarme, a zealous partisan of equality before the law, slipped handcuffs on his wrists.

This operation accomplished (and it took but a few seconds, thanks to the prisoner's stupefaction and the dexterity of the gendarme), the two agents of armed authority escorted Baron Michel to Saint Colombin, where they locked him up in a sort of cellar contiguous to the post occupied by the troops cantoned there, and which served as a temporary prison.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEREIN TRIGAUD DEMONSTRATES THAT IF HE HAD HAD HERCULES' CHANCE, HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE ACCOMPLISHED TWENTY-FOUR LABORS, INSTEAD OF TWELVE.

It was almost four in the afternoon when Michel, introduced to the guard-house of the Saint Colombin post, was able to realize all the attractions of his temporary abode.

As he entered that species of dungeon, the young man's eyes, accustomed to the bright light of the outside world, could not at first make out anything; they had to become accustomed to the darkness gradually, before the prisoner succeeded in reconnoitring the apartment which had been allotted him.

It was an old cellar or store-room about twelve feet square, which, whatever its original use, afforded the conditions of security and isolation which were required of it on this occasion.

It was half above and half below the ground; its walls were considerably thicker and better built than is usually the case in such structures, because they served as the foundation of the house above them.

The bare earth formed the floor, and the locality was so damp that said earth was almost muddy; the ceiling was made of timbers placed very close together.

Ordinarily, light was supplied by a large air-hole just at the level of the ground outside; but to meet the exigencies of the occasion the hole had been closed within

by heavy planks, and without by an enormous millstone placed against the wall directly in front of the opening.

The hole in the centre of the stone came opposite the upper part of the opening, and through that a feeble ray of light straggled in; but it was two thirds shut off by the planks on the inside, and cast a sickly light on only one small spot in the middle of the cellar.

Just at that spot were the remains of a cider press (that is to say, a trunk of a tree squared at one end, and partly rotten) and a circular trough of hewn stone, all covered with fantastic marks by the slugs and snails in their capricious promenades.

For any other prisoner than Michel the result of his inspection would have been completely discouraging, for there was little or no hope of escape; but he had been actuated by nothing more than a sort of vague curiosity. The first cruel sorrow which his heart had ever known had plunged him into that state of prostration in which the mind is indifferent to everything that occurs; and in the first anguish of renouncing the sweet hopes he had so long cherished of being beloved by Mary, palace and prison were alike to him.

He sat on the trough, wondering who the young man in the blouse, with Mary, could have been, laying aside his transports of jealousy only to lose himself in his memories of the early days of his acquaintance with the sisters. Either line of thought was equally painful to him; for as has been well-said by the Florentine poet, the unequalled delineator of infernal torture, the remembrance of happy times when misfortune weighs us down, is the worst of all sorrow.

But we will leave the young baron with his troubles, to see what was going on in other parts of the post of Saint Colombin.

This post had been occupied for some days by a detachment of troops of the Line, and consisted of a vast building, the front of which looked on a courtyard, and the rear on the parish road from Saint Colombin to Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu, about a kilometre from the first named village, and two hundred yards from the road from Nantes to Sables d'Olonne.

This building, built upon the site and with the remains of an old feudal fortress, stood on an elevation which overlooked the whole neighborhood. Its advantageous situation attracted Dermoncourt's attention when he was returning from his expedition in the forest of Machecoul. He left a score of men there. It was like a sort of block-house, where the flying columns might at need find lodging or shelter, and at the same time a sort of depot where prisoners could be held until the establishment of regular communication between Saint Philbert and Nantes should make it possible to send them to the latter place with an escort sufficiently imposing to obviate the danger of a rescue.

The main building consisted of one huge room directly over the cellar where Michel was held in durance, and about six feet above the ground. It was used as a guard-house, and was reached by a flight of steps made from the ruins of the donjon, and placed parallel with the wall.

There was also a barn, used as barracks by the soldiers, who slept on the straw.

Regular guard-duty was done by the squad; there was a sentinel in front of the courtyard gate which opened on the road, and a lookout on the top of an ivy-covered tower, which was the only portion left standing of the old feudal structure.

About six o'clock in the evening, the soldiers compos-

ing the little garrison were sitting about on road rollers which had been left lying by the side of the house. It was their favorite spot for a siesta. They enjoyed the balmy warmth of the declining sun, and the gorgeous view of the lake of Grand-Lieu, which they could see in the distance; its surface, tinted by the rays of the bright star of day, resembled momentarily a vast sheet of molten iron. At their feet wound the road to Nantes, like a broad ribbon in the midst of the verdant growths which carpeted the fields at that season; and we must admit that our heroes in red breeches were much more attentive to what was happening on the road than to the magnificence of the panorama spread before them by Dame Nature.

With the approach of evening the laborers were leaving their tasks and the cattle returning to their stables, and the road was sufficiently thronged to give variety to the picture. Every load of hay, every group returning from Nantes market, above all every short-skirted peasant woman, furnished a text for comment and jest; and we are obliged to say that for some time there had been no lack of either.

"Look!" exclaimed one of them suddenly, "what's that I see down there?"

"It's a hurdy-gurdy man coming to play to us," said another.

"What do you say? A hurdy-gurdy man?" laughed a third. "What the devil! do you think you're still in Bretagne? There aren't any such things here, mark that; there's nothing but grumblers."

"What's that he has on his back, then, if it is n't his instrument?"

"It is, indeed, his instrument," said a fourth soldier; "but the instrument is an organ."

"Devil an organ!" retorted the first speaker. "I tell you it's his wallet. He's a beggar; you can tell by his uniform."

"Oho, that's pretty good! A wallet with two eyes and a nose like yours and mine. Look again, Limousin!"

"Limousin's arms are long, but his sight isn't very good," chimed in another; "one can't have everything."

"Come, come," said the corporal, "let's see about this! Just as sure as you live, it's a man with another man on his shoulders!"

"The corporal is right," said the soldiers, in chorus.

"I am always right," said the man with the gold lace, "in the first place as your corporal, and then as your superior officer, generally speaking; and if there can be any who doubt after I have stated a fact, they will soon be convinced, for here come our men."

The beggar who had given cause for this discussion, and in whom our readers have doubtless recognized Trigaud, just as they have identified his hurdy-gurdy, his organ, and his wallet with his guide and master Aubin Courte-Joie, had, in fact, turned to the left, and was climbing the slope which led to the post-house.

"What a villanous pair of brigands!" growled one of the soldiers; "just think what a rod the scoundrel would have in pickle for a fellow who should meet him alone at the corner of a hedge; would n't he, corporal?"

"It's quite possible," the officer replied.

"But as he sees we are in force, he is coming to ask alms instead, the sneak!" rejoined the soldier.

"What the devil have I to give him except my pocket-piece," said the first speaker.

"Wait," said another, picking up a stone, "I'll put this in his hat."

"Don't you do it," said the corporal.

"Why not?"

"Because he has n't got a hat."

The soldiers roared with laughter at this joke, which they unanimously considered to be in the best possible taste.

"Whatever the thing that the goodman plays on, boys," said one, "let's not frighten him off. Do you find life in this wretched hole so diverting that you can afford to despise any sort of show that comes along?"

"Show?"

"Yes, or concert, if you please. All the laborers in this region are troubadours in some degree. We will make him sing everything he knows and everything he does n't know; it will help to pass away the evening."

As he spoke, the beggar, who had long since ceased to be an enigma to the soldiers, was within four paces of them, and held out his hand.

"You were right, corporal, in saying that it was a man he had on his shoulders."

"No, I was mistaken," retorted the corporal.

"How so?"

"It is n't a man; it's only half a one."

And the soldiers split their sides at this second joke, as they had at the first.

"There's a fellow who does n't have to lay out much for pantaloons."

"And still less for boots!" observed the facetious corporal, whose pleasantry produced its ordinary effect.

"Well, if they're not pretty creatures!" exclaimed the Limousin; "on my word, one would say it was a monkey riding a bear."

While these quips were passing back and forth, and assailing him on all sides, Trigaud stood unmoved. He stretched out his hand, assumed an expression more and

more affecting; while Courte-Joie, in his capacity of spokesman of the firm, kept on whining through his nose, —

“Have pity, please, kind gentlemen! have pity on a poor wagoner who had both legs cut off by his wagon on the hill out of Ancenis.”

“They must be natural-born idiots,” said a soldier, “to ask alms of such as we! Here, you miserable devils! by searching all our pockets you might possibly find half as much as there is in yours.”

Whereupon Aubin Courte-Joie varied his formula, and stated more precisely the object of his prayers.

“A bit of bread, kind gentlemen, please,” said he. “If you have no money, you must have a bit of bread.”

“Bread you shall have, my lad,” replied the corporal; “and with the bread some soup; and with the soup a bit of meat, if there’s any left. That’s what we will do for you; now be good enough to tell us what you have to offer us.”

“My kind gentlemen, I will pray for you,” snuffled Courte-Joie.

“That can do no harm,” rejoined the corporal, — “that can certainly do no harm; but that’s not enough. Let’s see if you have n’t something amusing in your cartridge-box.”

“What do you mean?” asked Aubin, feigning simplicity.

“I mean that rascally birds as you are, you perhaps know a catching tune or two. In that case bring out your music. We will take our pay in that for the bread, soup, and meat.”

“Oh, yes, yes, I understand; and I should never think of refusing, my officer!” said Aubin, with mild flattery. “If you represent God’s charity to us, the

least we can do in return is to try to amuse you and your men a bit."

"Go ahead and amuse us the best you can. You need n't be afraid of doing too much in that line, for we are damnably bored in this beastly country of yours."

"Very well," said Courte-Joie, "we will try to show you something you never saw before."

Although this commonplace promise was the regular exordium of every mountebank, it aroused the eager curiosity of the soldiers, who surrounded the two beggars in open-mouthed silence, so interested in what was to come as to be almost respectful.

Courte-Joie, who had thus far retained his place upon Trigaud's shoulders, made a movement with his stumps which signified that he desired to be deposited on the ground; and Trigaud, with unquestioning obedience to his master's will, placed him in a sitting posture on a fragment of battlement half covered with nettles, to the right of the roller on which the soldiers had been sitting.

"The devil! how straight he is!" exclaimed the corporal; "I should like to get hold of that rascal and sell him to the old major who can't find a young turkey to his taste."

Courte-Joie meanwhile had picked up a stone and handed it to Trigaud. The giant, without asking for further instructions pressed it between his fingers, opened his hand, and exhibited the stone ground to powder.

"Damnation! he's a perfect Hercules! Here's a chance for you, Pinguet," said the corporal, turning to the soldier whom we have already mentioned several times under the name of Limousin.

"All right, we'll see about it," replied the latter, darting into the courtyard.

Trigaud, without noticing either the words or the actions of Pinguet, phlegmatically continued his exercises.

He seized two soldiers by their belts, lifted them gently, and held them at arms' length for some seconds, and placed them on the ground again with perfect ease.

The soldiers applauded vociferously.

"Come, come, Pinguet, where the deuce are you?" they cried. "Here's a dog who leaves you way out of sight!"

Trigaud kept on as if his feats of strength had all been arranged in advance. He invited two more soldiers to mount on the shoulders of the other two, and proceeded to lift the four with almost as much ease as when there were but two.

As he was putting them down, Pinguet appeared with a gun on each shoulder.

"Bravo, Limousin, bravo!" shouted his mates.

Encouraged by their applause, he cried, —

"That's all tom-foolery! Here, you man-eater, just do as I do."

Putting a finger in the barrel of each gun, he raised them and held them out straight at arms' length.

"Bah!" said Aubin, while Trigaud stared at Limousin's *tour de force* with a movement of the lips which might pass for a smile; "bah! just go and get two more!"

They were brought, and Trigaud put a finger of his right hand in each of the four barrels, and raised them to the level of his eye without any apparent contraction of the muscles to indicate that he was putting forth the least effort.

At the first blow, Pinguet was distanced so completely that he gave up the struggle forever.

Trigaud next fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out a horse-shoe which he bent double as easily as an ordinary man would bend a leathern thong.

After each exhibition he turned to Courte-Joie, begging with his eyes for a smile; and Courte-Joie signified his satisfaction with a nod.

"So far, my boy," said he, "you have only earned our supper; now see what you can do toward procuring us lodgings for the night. Say, kind gentlemen, if my comrade does something still more wonderful than all you have seen as yet, won't you give us a sack of straw, and a corner in the stable to lie in?"

"Oh, that's absolutely impossible," said the sergeant, who had come up to see what was going on, attracted by the shouts and bravoes of the soldiers; "the orders distinctly forbid it."

This reply seemed altogether to disconcert Courte-Joie, and his expression changed from idiotic to grave.

"Pshaw!" rejoined a soldier, "we will club together to raise ten sous, with which you can go to the nearest inn and pay for a bed much more comfortable than rye-stalks."

"If that ox who acts as your mount," added another, "has legs as strong as his arms, a kilometre or two won't trouble you much."

"Let's have the trick first! Trot out the masterpiece!" chorussed the soldiers.

It would have been a shame to allow Trigaud to lose the benefit of their enthusiasm, and Courte-Joie yielded to their urgency, with a degree of readiness which proved how great was his confidence in his companion's biceps.

"Have you a piece of stone here?" he asked. "Something that will weigh twelve or fifteen hundred?"

"There's the block you're sitting on," said one.

Courte-Joie gave a scornful shrug.

"If this stone had a handle," said he, "Trigaud would lift it for you with one hand."

"There's the mill-stone which we put in front of the air-hole of the dungeon," suggested another.

"Why not take the house and be done with it?" said the corporal. "If you were six men, in the first place, and if you found any difficulty with a crowbar, how mad I should be that my grade would not permit me to give you a lift, and call you a pack of sluggards!"

"Besides, it mustn't be touched," said the sergeant; "that's in the orders, too, for there's a prisoner in the dungeon."

Courte-Joie looked at Trigaud with a wink; and the latter, without heeding the sergeant's remark, walked toward the mass of stone.

"Do you hear what I do you the honor to say to you?" called the sergeant, raising his voice, and seizing Trigaud's arm; "that's not to be touched!"

"Why not?" said Courte-Joie. "If he takes the stone from its place, he'll put it back, never fear."

"Besides, when you have once seen the mouse that's in the trap, you won't be afraid of his escaping," volunteered a soldier; "a poor little fellow who might be taken for a woman in disguise. I thought at first it was the Duchesse de Berry."

"Not to mention the fact that he's too busy weeping ever to think of getting away," put in the corporal, who was evidently burning with eagerness to see the experiment. "When Pinguet and I—I should say I and Pinguet—went to carry him his rations, he burst into tears as if his eyes were bung-holes."

"All right," said the sergeant, who was probably no

less curious than the others to see how the beggar would succeed in his titanic task; "go ahead! I'll take the risk."

Trigaud took advantage of the permission. In two steps he was beside the stone; and placing his arms around it near the bottom, he leaned his shoulder against the centre, and made a mighty effort to raise it.

But the weight of the enormous mass had depressed the soft earth on which it was laid, so that it had sunk in three or four inches, and Trigaud's strength was thus in a measure neutralized by the adhesion of the soil.

Courte-Joie had approached the group of soldiers, crawling on his hands and knees like a huge crab; he called attention to the condition of affairs which interfered with the giant's success, and found a broad flat stone, partly with which and partly with his hands he released the mill-stone from the dirt in which it was sunk.

Then Trigaud buckled to afresh, and was successful this time in raising the mass; for some seconds he held it against his shoulder within a foot of the ground.

The soldiers' enthusiasm knew no bounds after that. They crowded around Trigaud, loading him with congratulations, to which the giant seemed perfectly insensible; they indulged in loud and excited exclamations of admiration, which infected the corporal, and through him, rose, in the natural order of things, to the sergeant himself; they contemplated no less a compliment than carrying Trigaud off in triumph to the mess, where the reward of his might awaited him, swearing by all the oaths known and unknown to the disciples of Mars, that he had deserved much more than the bread and soup and meat they had agreed to give him, and that the ordinary of the general, or of the king himself, would be none too good to sustain the strength necessary for such feats.

As we just said, Trigaud seemed in no way set up by his triumph. His face remained as expressionless as that of an ox, when given a chance to rest after his labor; but his eyes, which never quitted Courte-Joie's, seemed to be saying to him,—

“Master, are you content?”

Aubin, on the other hand, was simply radiant; doubtless it was on account of the impression produced upon the spectators by these exhibitions of a physical force which he, rather than the man upon whom Nature had bestowed it, might call his own. His satisfaction may also have been due to the success which had attended a little manœuvre he had very cleverly performed, while general attention was directed toward his companion. This manœuvre consisted in slipping under the mill-stone the broad flat stone he held in his hand, and adjusting it in such fashion that the enormous mass which blocked the air-hole of the prison was balanced on the smooth surface of the smaller stone, and thenceforth any child could push it away from the opening.

The two beggars were escorted to the canteen, and there Trigaud furnished new food for the wondering admiration of the soldiers.

After he had engulfed an enormous bowl of soup, they put before him four rations of beef, and two large loaves. Trigaud ate his first loaf with the first two rations; then, as if by changing his manner of deglutition he expected to change for the better the taste of the objects subjected to that process, he took his other loaf, cut it in halves across, dug the soft part out of the centre and swallowed it as a mere trifle, placed the remaining meat in the empty space, put the two halves of the crust together, and buried his teeth in it with an air of indifference and a strength of jaw which delighted the assemblage, and extorted thunders of applause.

After five minutes of this exercise, the loaf was annihilated as completely as if it had been passed between two mill-stones like the one Trigaud had lifted to the bewilderment of the company, and nothing was left of it save a few crumbs, which Trigaud, who seemed all ready to begin anew, gathered up with great care.

They hastened to bring him a third loaf; and, although it was dry, he dealt with it as with the others.

The soldiers were not satisfied; they would willingly have sacrificed all their stores to carry the experiment to the end; but the sergeant thought it best to put bounds to their scientific researches.

Courte-Joie had relapsed into thoughtfulness, and his demeanor attracted attention.

"See here! you are eating and drinking on your comrade's credit," said the corporal to him; "it is n't fair, and it seems to me that you owe us a bit of a song, just to pay your scot."

"No doubt of it!" said the sergeant.

"Yes, yes, a song!" cried the soldiers; "then the party will be complete."

"Humph!" grunted Courte-Joie; "I do know some songs."

"All right, so much the better!"

"Yes, but perhaps they won't be to your liking."

"So long as they're not any of your incantations to bring the devil on earth, they will entertain us; at Saint Colombin, we're not hard to please."

"Ah!" said Aubin, "I see; you're bored here."

"Infernally!" the sergeant assented.

"Oh, we don't ask you to sing like M. Nourrit," said a Parisian.

"The funnier it is, the better," suggested another.

"As I have eaten your bread, and drank your wine,"

said Courte-Joie, "I have no right to refuse you; but I tell you again that you probably will not find my *chansons* to your taste."

He thereupon rolled out the following verses, —

Alerte ! alerte ! A l'horizon la-bas,
Voyez-vous l'infemale bande ?
Pour la surprendre égaillez-vous, les gars,
A van les bois, à van la lande !
Eh gai ! eh gai ! égaillez-vous, les gars !

Fusil au poing, l'œil au guet, en silence,
Attendez le bataillon bleu.
Comme un serpent, il avance, il avance —
Soldats du roi, soldats de Dieu,
Enfermez-le dans un cercle de feu !¹

Courte-Joie went no farther. The amazement aroused by his first words was followed by angry exclamations; ten soldiers threw themselves upon him, while the sergeant seized him by the throat and threw him on the floor.

"Ah, you dog!" he cried, "I'll teach you to sing praises of the brigands right to our faces!"

But before the officer finished his sentence, in which he did not fail to introduce one of the expletives which fell familiarly from his tongue, Trigaud, with eyes blazing with anger, made a line through the assailants, pushed back the subaltern, and planted himself in front of his companion in so threatening an attitude that for some moments the troops stood mute and wavering.

¹ "On guard! on guard! Do you not see the hellish band in the distance? Call the *gars* together to surprise them; to the woods! to the moor! Gayly, gayly! call the *gars* together!"

"Gun in hand, and eyes on the watch, lie in wait in silence for the 'blue' battalion. Like a serpent it comes on. Soldiers of the king, soldiers of God, surround it with a circle of fire!"

But soon blushing to be kept at bay by one unarmed man, they drew their swords, and rushed upon the two beggars.

"Kill them! kill them!" they yelled; "they are Chouans!"

"You asked me for a song; I warned you that the ones I know would n't suit you!" cried Courte-Joie in a voice heard above the uproar. "You need n't have insisted. What are you finding fault about?"

"If you don't know any songs that are different from the one we just heard," was the sergeant's retort, "you're a rebel, and I arrest you summarily."

"I know songs which suit the people of the villages, where I collect the alms on which I live. A poor crippled wretch like me, and an idiot like my companion, can't be dangerous. Arrest us, if you choose, but you will get small honor out of such captures."

"That may be; however, you shall sleep in the guard-house! You were anxious about lodgings for the night, and I will supply you. Here, search them, and shut them up at once."

But as Trigaud maintained his threatening attitude, no one was in any hurry to execute the order.

"If you don't surrender with a good grace," said the sergeant, "I will send for loaded muskets, and we'll see if your hide is bullet-proof."

"Come, Trigaud, come, my lad," said Aubin, "we must submit; besides, what's the odds! we shall not be detained long. Such fine prisons were never built for poor devils like us."

"That's right," said the sergeant, very well pleased with the pacific aspect of affairs. "You will be searched, and if nothing suspicious is found on you and you behave yourself during the night, to-morrow morning I will see that you're set at liberty."

The pockets of the beggars were gone through, but nothing was found in them except a few small coins, so that the sergeant's clement purpose was confirmed.

"Indeed," said he, pointing to Trigaud, "that great oaf is not guilty anyway, and I don't see why I should shut him up."

"To say nothing of the fact," remarked Limousin, "that if he happens to take it into his head, like his ancestor Samson, to shake the walls, he will have them down about our ears."

"You are right, Pinguet," said the sergeant, "especially as your opinion agrees with mine. It would be a bother to have them both on our hands at once. Come, clear out, my friend, quickly!"

"Oh, dear monsieur, don't separate us," exclaimed Courte-Joie, in a tearful voice; "we don't know how to get along without one another. He does my walking for me, and I do his seeing for him."

"Upon my word," said a soldier, "they're worse than a pair of lovers!"

"No," said the sergeant to Aubin, "I propose to make you pass the night in the cell to punish you, and to-morrow the commanding officer will decide what to do with your carcass. Off we go without any more talk!"

Two soldiers approached to seize Courte-Joie; but with a nimbleness hardly to be looked for in such an incomplete frame, he climbed up on Trigaud's shoulders, and the latter walked quietly along toward the cellar, escorted by the soldiers.

On the road Aubin put his mouth to his companion's ear, and whispered a few words to him. Trigaud set him down at the door of the cellar, which the cripple entered under the impulse of a hearty push from the sergeant, rolling over and over like a huge ball.

Then they put Trigaud outside the barnyard gate, and closed it behind him.

Trigaud remained for some moments motionless and confused, as if he did not know what course to pursue. He tried at first to sit down on the trough where the soldiers took their siesta; but the sentinel informed him that it was impossible for him to remain there, so he started away in the direction of the hamlet of Saint Colombin.

CHAPTER V.

THE ESCAPE.

ABOUT two hours after the incarceration of Aubin Courte-Joie, the sentinel on duty in front of the little station heard the noise of a wagon ascending the hill from the fields. Following his orders, he cried, "*Qui vive?*" and when the wagon was within a few paces of him, he ordered it to halt.

The wagon, or the driver thereof, obeyed.

The corporal and four soldiers came out of the guard-house to investigate the new arrivals.

They found a respectable vehicle loaded with hay, just like many others which had passed along the Nantes road during the evening. There was no one aboard except the driver, who explained that he was bound for Saint Philbert to deliver the hay to its owner. He added that he had taken the night for his journey to economize time, which was very precious at that season; and the officer ordered that he be allowed to proceed.

But this gracious permission was completely wasted on the poor man. His wagon, drawn by a single horse, had come to a halt on the very steepest part of the ascent, and the most vigorous efforts of horse and driver failed to advance it a foot.

"It's an infernal shame," said the corporal, "to overload a poor beast like this! You must see that your horse has twice as much as he can pull."

"What a pity," said another, "that the sergeant turned away that badly groomed bull we had here just now! We could have hitched him alongside the horse, and he would have done the business in great shape."

"You take it for granted that he would have consented to be hitched up," put in another.

If the speaker could have seen what was going on behind the wagon, he would have been convinced that Trigaud would have objected seriously to being made use of to draw the vehicle forward; furthermore, he would have reached a clearer understanding of the difficulty experienced by the horse in starting his load. For this difficulty was due, in great part, to the beggar himself, who, completely sheltered by the darkness, had seized the wooden bar, used to keep the load in place, and thrown himself back with his full weight, thereby neutralizing the struggles of the horse with a degree of success which went far beyond all his efforts earlier in the evening.

"Do you want us to give you a lift?" inquired the corporal.

"Wait till I try once more," replied the driver, who had slanted the wagon across the road so as to decrease the steepness of the ascent, and was preparing to make an attempt to clear his skirts of the corporal's reproof.

He lashed his horse vigorously, urging him with his voice and jerks at the bridle. The soldiers yelled with him. The horse strained his muscles, striking millions of sparks from the stones in the road. At last the poor beast fell exhausted; and at the same moment, as if the wheels had encountered some obstacle, the wagon tipped up to the left and turned over on its side against the building.

The soldiers rushed forward, and busied themselves

unharnessing the horse. The result of their haste was that they failed to see Trigaud, who, content, no doubt, with the outcome to which he had largely contributed, by crawling under the vehicle and raising it on one side with his herculean shoulders until it lost its centre of gravity, quietly slipped away and disappeared behind a hedge.

"Do you want us to help you put your cart on its pins again?" said the corporal. "If we do, you must go and get an extra horse."

"Faith, no!" was the reply. "I'll wait till to-morrow, when it will be daylight. The good God is plainly opposed to my going on to-night, and one mustn't oppose his will."

As he spoke, the peasant threw the traces over his horse's back, took off the collar, climbed up on his back, and rode away, after bidding the soldiers good-night.

Two hundred feet from the guard-house, Trigaud overtook him.

"Well," queried the peasant, "did I work it all right? Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," replied Trigaud, "that's the way *gars* Aubin Courte-Joie said we were to do."

"Good luck to you, then! Now I'll take the horse back where I got him. This is more comfortable than that old wagon. When the wagoner wakes up to-morrow morning and hunts for his hay, he'll be rather astonished to find it up there, won't he?"

"Just tell him it's for the good of the cause," said Trigaud, "and he won't growl."

The two men separated, but Trigaud did not leave the neighborhood. He continued to prowl around until he heard eleven o'clock strike on Saint Colombin Church. Then he went up toward the guard-house again, with his

shoes in his hand, without making a sound to attract the attention of the sentry whom he heard walking back and forth, and crept close up to the air-hole connecting with the cellar prison.

He then noiselessly pulled the hay out of the wagon and piled it up on the ground, so as to make a very thick bed. Upon this bed he gently lowered the mill-stone which blocked the air-hole, stooped over into the opening, broke the boards laid against it on the inside, pulled out Courte-Joie, pushed by Michel from behind, then gave a hand to the baron himself. This successfully accomplished, Trigaud, still barefooted, took one of them on each shoulder; and notwithstanding his corpulence and the double weight he was carrying, stole away from the spot, with no more noise than a cat makes walking on a carpet.

When he had gone about five hundred yards, he stopped,—not that he was tired, but because Aubin Courte-Joie so ordered.

Michel slid down to the ground, and drew from his pocket a handful of money, including several gold pieces, all of which he thrust into Trigaud's mammoth hand.

Trigaud made as if to pour it into a pocket twice as capacious as the hand which received it, but Aubin stopped him.

"Give it back to Monsieur," said he. "We don't receive with both hands."

"With both hands! What do you mean?" Michel asked.

"Oh, we have n't done you, personally, so great a favor as you imagine, perhaps," said Courte-Joie.

"I don't understand, my friend."

"My young gentleman," said the cripple, "now that

we are well clear of that hole, I will confess to you frankly that I lied to you a bit just now when I told you that I got myself locked up for the sole purpose of helping you out; but it was necessary for me to obtain some slight assistance from you, or I should have found it impossible to hoist myself up to the air-hole and to get you out after me. Now that our escape has been accomplished without a hitch, thanks to your co-operation and my friend Trigaud's wrist, I am bound to confess to you that you have simply exchanged one form of captivity for another."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that just now you were in a damp, unhealthy prison, and that now you are out in the fields in the beautiful, still night; but you are in prison, none the less."

"In prison?"

"Yes; or a prisoner, at all events."

"Whose prisoner?"

"Why, mine, to be sure!"

"Yours?" exclaimed Michel, laughing.

"Yes; for ten or fifteen minutes. Oh, you need n't laugh! You're my prisoner until I turn you over to the hands which claim you."

"Whose hands are those?"

"That you can find out for yourself. I discharge my commission, — no more, no less. You must not despair; that's all I can tell you. You might well fare worse than you have."

"But, then —"

"It's like this: In consideration of certain favors done me, and with a rich honorarium to my poor devil of a Trigaud, I was told to 'rescue M. le Baron Michel de la Logerie and take him to' — a certain person. I have

rescued you, Monsieur le Baron, and now I am doing the rest of it."

"Listen," said the youth, utterly in the dark as to the drift of what the Montaignu inn-keeper was saying, "here's my purse. Now just put me on the road to La Logerie, where I wish to return this evening, and receive my warm thanks."

Michel was under the impression that his rescuers did not consider that they had been rewarded in proportion to the service they had rendered.

"Monsieur," replied Courte-Joie, with all the dignity he could muster, "my *compère* Trigaud can't accept your money because he has already been paid to do exactly the opposite of what you ask. As for myself, I don't know whether you know who I am. At all events, I propose to make myself known. I am a respectable business man, compelled by certain differences of opinion with the existing Government to leave his establishment. But however wretched my exterior appearance may be at this moment, please understand that I render services, but never sell them."

"But where the devil are you taking me to?" asked Michel, who was far from expecting to find his interlocutor so sensitive.

"Be good enough to follow us, and I promise you that you shall know within the hour."

"Follow you, when you announce that I am your prisoner! Upon my word, that would be obliging on my part! Don't expect it!"

Courte-Joie made no reply, but a single glance was sufficient to inform Trigaud what he had to do. The young baron had barely finished his sentence when the beggar, thrusting out his arm like a grappling-iron, had him by the collar.

He tried to scream, preferring the custody of the soldiers to that of Trigaud; but the giant, with his unoccupied hand, stopped his mouth as completely as M. de Vendôme's celebrated choke-pear. And they traversed six or seven hundred yards in this way, with the speed of race-horses, Michel half-hanging at the end of the arm of the Colossus, merely touching the ground with the tips of his toes.

"That will do, Trigaud," said Courte-Joie, who had resumed his place on the beggar's shoulders, without apparently incommoding him in the least, — "that will do. The baron ought by this time to have got rid of all desire to return to La Logerie. Besides, you know, we were very urgently requested not to damage the goods."

"Well, will you be reasonable now?" he said to Michel, as Trigaud came to a halt.

"You are the stronger, and I am unarmed," replied he; "so I suppose I must make up my mind to put up with your rough usage."

"Rough usage! Ah, don't talk like that, or I shall have to appeal to your honor, and beg you to tell me if it is n't true that you have kept dinning it into my ears in that pest-hole of the Blues, and since we got you out of it, that you wanted to return to La Logerie, and that you forced us to use violence by your obstinacy in that regard."

"At least tell me now the name of the person who instructed you to busy yourself about me, and take me to him."

"That I am positively forbidden to do," said Aubin. "But I can, without transgressing my orders, tell you that the person in question is a friend of yours."

A shiver of apprehension froze Michel's heart.

He thought of Bertha.

The poor boy fancied that she had received his letter, that the insulted She-wolf was now awaiting him; and although the explanation which the interview would bring about could but be painful to him, he felt that his sense of delicacy forbade his declining it.

"Never mind," said he, "I know who it is."

"You know?"

"Yes; it's Mademoiselle de Souday."

Aubin made no reply, but looked at Trigaud, with an expression which seemed to say, "Faith, he's guessed it!"

Michel intercepted the glance, and understood it.

"Let us go on," said he.

"Won't you try again to escape?"

"No."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"Very well; now that you're reasonable again, we will fix it so that you needn't tear your feet with thorns or get bemired in this infernal clay, which makes one's boots weigh tons."

Michel soon had these words explained to his satisfaction. He crossed the road behind Trigaud, and had not taken a hundred steps in the woods when he heard a horse neigh.

"My horse!" he cried, with no attempt to conceal his surprise.

"Did you suppose we had stolen him, pray?" demanded Courte-Joie.

"How did it happen that I failed to find you at the place where I left him in your care?"

"I'll just tell you. We noticed certain people prowling around us who seemed to be staring at us with so

much interest that we could n't help a feeling of uneasiness. And, faith! as inquisitive folks are not to our taste, and as hours passed and you did n't return, we decided to take your horse back to Banlœuvre, where we supposed you would eventually bring up, if you were n't arrested; and we were on the way there when we saw that you were not, — up to that time."

"Not, up to that time?"

"No; but you were very shortly after."

"Do you mean that you were near me when the gendarmes arrested me?"

"My young gentleman," retorted Aubin, banteringly, "you must be extremely green to dream about your private affairs when you are travelling on the high-road, instead of keeping your eyes open to see who are going and coming, and what is going on. For a good ten minutes you could have heard the horses of those fellows, for we heard it; and nothing could have been simpler than to turn aside into the woods, as we did."

Michel was careful not to divulge the subject which had so completely absorbed his thought at the time Aubin recalled. He merely sighed heavily, at the remembrance of all his suffering, and mounted his horse, which Trigaud had unhitched and was holding for him most awkwardly, while Courte-Joie tried to show him how to go to work to hold the stirrup as it should be held.

They then returned to the road; and the beggar, with his hand on the horse's withers, accommodated his gait perfectly to that assumed by Michel.

Half a league farther on, they took a cross-path. Notwithstanding the darkness, the shape of the black masses of trees in certain spots struck Michel familiarly.

They soon reached a cross-road, the sight of which made him start. He had passed by there the evening that he took Bertha home the first time. •

The travellers had just passed the cross-road and taken the path leading to the Tinguy cottage, where a light was shining, despite the lateness of the hour, when some one called from the other side of the hedge which skirted the road.

Courte-Joie at once replied.

"Is it you, Master Courte-Joie?" said a female voice, as a white form appeared above the hedge.

"Yes; but who are you?"

"Rosine Tinguy. Don't you know me?"

"Rosine!" exclaimed Michel, confirmed, by her presence, in his idea that Bertha was awaiting him.

Courte-Joie slid down Trigaud's body, with the agility of a monkey, and hopped toward the fence like a toad, while Trigaud remained to keep watch on Michel.

"*Dame!* little one," said Aubin, "it's so dark that it's easy to mistake white for gray. But why are n't you at home?" he continued, in an undertone. "That's where I was to meet you."

"Because there are people at the house, and you must n't take M. Michel there."

"People at the house? Have those damned Blues planted garrisons everywhere?"

"No, there are no Blues there. It's Jean Oullier with the Montaigu men, who have passed the day going about from house to house."

"What are they doing there?"

"Oh, talking. Go and join them; you can drink a glass with them, and warm yourself a bit."

"All right; but how about our young gentleman. What shall we do with him, my girl?"

"Leave him to me. Was n't that agreed, Master Courte-Joie?"

"We were to take him to your house, you know, and there we could find a corner of the cellar or garret to shut him up in, especially as he's not vicious; but here, in the midst of the fields, *mon Dieu!* there's great danger of losing him. He's as slippery as an eel!"

"Nonsense!" said Rosine, with one of the smiles which had brightened her face so seldom since the deaths of her father and brother. "Do you suppose he will make more trouble about going with a pretty girl than with two old fellows like you?"

"But what if the prisoner carries off his keeper?" queried Courte-Joie.

"Oh, don't worry about that! I have a sure foot, a quick eye, and a stout heart. Besides, Baron Michel is my foster-brother. We know one another of old, and I don't think him any more capable of betraying a young girl than of forcing the lock of a cell. But, after all, what were you told to do?"

"To set him free, if we could, and bring him, willy-nilly, to your father's house, where we should find you."

"Well, here am I. The house is right there in front of you, and the bird out of the cage. You've done all you were expected to do, have n't you?"

"Faith, I believe I have."

"Good-night, then."

"Say, Rosine, don't you want us to tie a string to his ankle, for greater safety?" chuckled Aubin.

"Thanks, thanks, *gars* Courte-Joie," said Rosine, walking toward the spot where Michel was waiting. "Try to put one on your own tongue."

Michel, although he had remained some distance away during this colloquy, had distinguished the name

of Rosine, and divined the connivance between her and his two rescuers who had become his keepers. Consequently, he was even more fully convinced that it was Bertha to whom he owed his freedom.

Courte-Joie's whole performance, — the violence he had used toward him through Trigaud, the mystery in which he had enveloped the cause and source of his interest in a man whom he hardly knew, — all this fitted in beautifully with the irritation which might, very naturally, have been aroused in the damsel's sensitive and excitable heart by the letter he had given to the notary Lorient for her.

"Is it you, Rosine? Is it you!" exclaimed Michel, raising his voice as he saw his foster-sister coming toward him in the darkness.

"Good!" said Rosine. "You're not like that wretch Courte-Joie, who was determined not to recognize me. You knew me at once, did n't you, Monsieur Michel?"

"Yes, of course. And now, Rosine, tell me —"

"What?"

"Where is Mademoiselle Bertha?"

"Mademoiselle Bertha?"

"Yes."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Rosine, with a simplicity which Michel at once knew to be unfeigned.

"What! You don't know?" he repeated.

"Why, I suppose she's at Souday."

"You don't know? You suppose?"

"*Dame!*"

"Have n't you seen her to-day?"

"No, Monsieur Michel, I have n't! All I know is that she was to return to the château to-day with M. le Marquis. But I was at Nantes myself."

"At Nantes!" cried the young man. "You were at Nantes to-day?"

"Why, yes."

"What time were you there, Rosine?"

"Nine o'clock struck as we were crossing the Pont Rousseau."

"You say *we*?"

"Of course."

"Then you were n't alone?"

"Why, no; for I was with Mademoiselle Mary. It was that that delayed her, because they had to send to the château for me."

"Where is Mademoiselle Mary?"

"Now?"

"Yes."

"She is at the islet of La Jonchère, where I am going to take you. Why, how absurd you are to ask all these questions, Monsieur Michel!"

"You are going to take me to her!" cried Michel, beside himself with joy. "Come quick, then! Pray, come quick, my little Rosine!"

"Well, well! and that old fool Courte-Joie said that I should have trouble in getting you to go. Are these men idiots?"

"Rosine, my child, in Heaven's name, let us lose no time!"

"I ask nothing better. Do you want to take me up behind, so that we can go more quickly?"

"I should say so!" said Michel, whose heart, at the mere thought of seeing Mary, had in a moment abjured all its jealous distrust, and who was wholly preoccupied with the idea that it was his beloved who had interested herself so actively in his welfare. "Come! Why don't you come?"

"Here I am! Give me your hand," said Rosine, placing her foot on his.

"There, now, I'm all right," she said, as she sprang to her place behind him. "Now, keep to the right."

The young man obeyed without any more thought of Trigaud and Courte-Joie than if they no longer existed.

For him there was no one in the world but Mary.

They rode along in silence for a few steps; but when they were once underway, the young baron asked nothing better than to talk, especially of Mary.

"Tell me," said he, "how Mademoiselle knew of my arrest by the gendarmes."

"Oh, dear! we must begin farther back than that, Monsieur Michel."

"Begin as far back as you please, dear Rosine, but begin somewhere! I am burning with impatience. Oh, how good it is to be free!" he exclaimed, "and to be on the way to see Mademoiselle Mary!"

"I must tell you, Monsieur Michel, that this morning at daybreak Mademoiselle Mary arrived at Souday. She borrowed my Sunday clothes, and said to me: 'Rosine, you must come with me.'"

"Go on, Rosine, go on, I am listening."

"So we started with eggs in our baskets, like real peasants. At Nantes, while I was selling my eggs, Mademoiselle did what business she had to do."

"What was her business there, Rosine?" asked Michel, before whose eyes the figure of the young man disguised as a peasant passed like a spectre.

"Oh, I don't know that, Monsieur Michel."

Without noticing the sigh which her companion emitted, she went on:—

"As Mademoiselle was terribly tired, we asked M. Lorient, the notary of Lége, to give us a lift in his car-

riage. We stopped on the road to feed the horse; and while the notary was chattering with the landlord about crops, we went into the garden, because all the passers-by were staring at Mademoiselle, — indeed, she was too lovely for a peasant. While we were there she read a letter which made her cry very hard."

"A letter?"

"Yes, a letter M. Lorient handed her on the way."

"My letter!" muttered Michel; "she read my letter to her sister! — oh!"

He stopped his horse abruptly, for he did not know whether he ought to be glad or sorry for this incident.

"Well, what are you doing?" inquired Rosine, not understanding the sudden halt.

"Nothing, nothing," Michel replied, giving the rein to his horse, who set off again at a trot; whereupon Rosine resumed her narrative.

"She was crying over that letter, as I said, when some one called us from the other side of the hedge; it was Courte-Joie and Trigaud. They told us about your misadventure, and asked Mademoiselle what they should do with your horse, which you had left with them. Then, poor girl, she had a much worse time than she had over the letter. She was completely upset; and she said so much to Courte-Joie (who is much beholden to M. le Marquis) that she induced him finally to try to get you out of the hands of the troops. A true friend you have in her, Monsieur Michel!"

Michel listened in an ecstasy of delight; he could not contain his joy, and his sense of being honored beyond measure; he would have paid Rosine with a gold-piece for every word she told him. He began to think that his horse moved very slowly; he broke a branch from a tree, and as he drank in what the girl was saying, he

tried to urge their mount into a gait more in accord with the beating of his heart.

"But why didn't she wait for me at your father's house, Rosine," he asked.

"That was what we thought of doing, Monsieur le Baron, and we got M. Loriot to set us down there, saying that we would go to Souday on foot. Mademoiselle impressed upon Courte-Joie that you were to be taken there, and that he must not allow you to go to Bankœuvre until you had seen me; but luck was against us. Our house, which has been so deserted since poor father's death, has been full as an inn all the evening. First, the marquis and Mademoiselle Bertha stopped there on their way to Souday; then came Jean Oullier, who had been drumming up the leaders of the parish bands. So at dusk, Mademoiselle Mary, who had been hiding in the attic, begged me to take her somewhere where she could see you without witnesses, if Courte-Joie set you free. But we shall soon be at the mill of Saint Philbert, and it won't be long before we can see the lake of Grand-Lieu."

This announcement of Rosine's that they were approaching the spot where Mary awaited them, was worth to the horse a more sharply accentuated blow of the switch than those which had gone before. It was clear to Michel that he was drawing near the crisis of his embarrassing situation. Mary knew of his love for her; she knew that it was strong enough to cause him to reject the alliance which had been offered him; she could not have taken offence, since her interest in him carried her so far as to do him the very greatest of favors,—so far as to risk compromising her reputation to accomplish that object. Timid, bashful, and unassuming as Michel was, his hopes mounted to the full height warranted by

the proofs of affection which Mary seemed to be giving him; it seemed impossible that a maiden who defied public opinion, her father's anger, and her sister's reproaches, to ensure the well-being of a man whose love and whose hopes were well known to her, should refuse to yield to that love, and to realize those hopes.

He was dreaming of a future, still somewhat cloudy, but in which the clouds were rose-tinted, when his horse began to descend the hill which lies to the south-east of the lake of Grand-Lieu, whose surface he could see gleaming darkly, like a mirror of tarnished steel.

"Are we near the place?" he asked Rosine.

"Yes," she replied, sliding down from the pillion; "now follow me."

Michel also alighted; they walked in among the osiers, where Michel tied the horse to a willow; then they proceeded some hundreds of feet through this thicket of flexible branches, and found themselves on the bank of a little creek which flowed into the lake.

Rosine jumped into a little flat-bottomed boat tied to the bank. Michel undertook to wield the oars; but Rosine, guessing that he was decidedly deficient in the art, shook her head, and seated herself in the bow, an oar in each hand.

"Let me row," said she; "I shall make better work of it than you. How many times I have pulled my poor father when he came to throw his nets in the lake!"

The poor girl raised her eyes, streaming with tears, to heaven, as if seeking the old man there.

"But can you find the islet of La Jonchère in the dark?" asked Michel, with the selfishness of the true lover.

"Look," said she, "and tell me if you see nothing on the water."

"Yes, I do, — something like a star."

"Well, Mademoiselle is holding that star in her hand; she must have heard us, and is coming to meet us."

Michel would have been glad to jump into the water so as to swim on ahead of the small craft, which made but slow progress, despite Rosine's nautical skill; it seemed to him as if they should never cover the distance between them and the light, which, however, increased momentarily in volume and brilliancy.

But the hope he had based upon the damsel's words was not gratified. When they were sufficiently near the islet to make out the single willow with which it was embellished, he failed to see Mary on the shore; a fire of reeds, which she had lighted no doubt, was burning away briskly at the water's edge.

"Why, Rosine!" the baron cried, excitedly, standing up in the boat, which he came near capsizing, "I don't see Mademoiselle Mary!"

"She is waiting in the cabin, then," said the young girl, grounding the boat. "Take one of those pieces of burning wood, and you will find the cabin on the other shore."

Michel leaped lightly ashore, did as his foster-sister advised, and hastened off toward the cabin.

The islet of La Jonchère contained some two or three hundred square metres; it was covered with rushes in all the low spots, which were overflowed when the lake rose in the spring freshets. There was a space of a hundred feet or so which was high enough to be out of reach.

On this spot, near the shore, Tinguy the father had built a little hut, which he used to use for duck-hunting in winter.

Rosine had taken Mary to this structure.

Great as were his hopes, Michel's heart was beating

fast enough to suffocate him, when he drew near the hut.

Just as he had his hand on the wooden latch of the door, the oppression became so great that he hesitated.

At that moment his eyes fell upon a small pane of glass in the upper part of the door, through which he could look inside.

He saw Mary seated on a bunch of rushes, with her head bent forward on her breast.

By the light of a wretched lantern which stood on a stool, he fancied he could see tears glistening in the maiden's eyes; and the thought that their presence might be due to him, swept away all his bashfulness.

He pushed the door open, and threw himself at her feet, crying, —

“ Mary, Mary, I love you ! ”

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH MARY WINS A VICTORY LIKE THAT
OF PYRRHUS.

HOWEVER strong may have been Mary's resolution to maintain her self-control, Michel's entrance was so sudden, his voice so laden with emotion, there was in his first words such a world of entreaty and of love, that the sweet child could not hold out against her own feelings. Her bosom palpitated, her hands trembled, and the tears the baron had fancied he saw between her lashes, fell one by one upon his hands which held hers in a warm, strong clasp. Luckily, the love-sick youth was too deeply agitated himself to notice her emotion, and she had time to recover her self-possession before he spoke again.

She gently pushed him away and looked all around.

Michel followed the direction of her glance, then fixed his eyes again upon her, anxious and questioning.

"How is it that you are alone, monsieur?" she asked. "Where is Rosine?"

"How does it happen, Mary," said the youth, in a voice of deep sadness, "that you are not, as I am, regardless of everything except the happiness of being together once more?"

"Ah, my friend," said Mary, emphasizing the word, "you have no right, above all just at this time, to doubt my interest in your welfare."

"No," cried Michel, trying to possess himself again of Mary's hands, which had got away from him, — "no;

for to you I owe my liberty, and my life too, in all likelihood ! ”

“ But,” interposed Mary, forcing herself to smile, “ all that must not make me forget that we are alone ; although I may be a *She-wolf*, dear Monsieur Michel, there are certain proprieties which I must not over-step. Be kind enough, please, to call Rosine.”

Michel heaved a heart-breaking sigh, and remained on his knees, while great tears gushed from his eyes.

Mary turned her eyes away that she might not see his tears, and made a motion to rise, but Michel detained her.

The poor boy had not enough experience of the human heart to observe that on several previous occasions Mary had exhibited no dread of being left with him in a *tête-à-tête* fully as solitary as this on the islet of La Jonchère could possibly be, and to draw inferences favorable to his lover's hopes from this distrust of herself and of him ; on the other hand, his lovely dreams were vanishing in smoke, and he suddenly found Mary as cold and indifferent again as she had been all the time of late.

“ Ah,” he cried, in a tone of grieved reproach, “ why did you have me torn from the hands of the soldiers ? They would have shot me perhaps, and I should have preferred that fate to the fate which awaits me, if you love me not.”

“ Oh, Michel, Michel ! ” cried Mary.

“ Yes,” said he, “ I said it, and I say it again.”

“ Don't talk so, you bad child ! ” rejoined Mary, affecting a parental tone. “ Don't you see that you drive me to despair ? ”

“ What does it matter to you ? ” said Michel.

“ Come, come,” Mary went on, “ you don't mean to say that you doubt my very warm and sincere friendship for you ? ”

"Alas, Mary!" replied the young man, mournfully, "it appears that the sentiment of which you speak does not satisfy that which has been devouring my heart since I first saw you; for no matter how certain I may be of your friendship, my heart demands something more."

Mary made a mighty effort.

"My friend, Bertha offers you what you ask of me; she loves you as you long to be loved, and as you deserve to be," said the poor child in a faltering voice, hastening to place her sister's name as a safeguard between herself and the man she loved so dearly.

Michel shook his head with a sigh.

"Oh, it's not she! it's not she!" he said.

"Why," rejoined Mary, quickly, as if she had not seen his gesture of dissent, or heard the cry of his heart, — "why need you have written her that letter, which would have killed her had it reached her?"

"Did you receive it?"

"Alas! yes," said Mary; "and notwithstanding all the suffering it caused me, I must confess that it was a great happiness to me!"

"Did you read it through?"

"Yes," replied the maiden, driven to cast down her eyes before the supplicating look the young man bent upon her as he asked the question, — "yes, I read it; and that was what made me want to speak to you, my friend, before you see Bertha again."

"But don't you understand, Mary, that the last part of the letter is no less true than the first, and that, if I love Bertha at all, it can only be as a sister, — as your sister and mine?"

"No, no," said Mary; "but I understand that my fate would be a fearful one if it were reserved for me to wreck the life of my poor sister, whom I love so dearly!"

"In that case," cried Michel, "what in Heaven's name, do you ask of me?"

"This," said Mary, clasping her hands: "I ask you to sacrifice a sentiment which has not had time to throw out very deep roots in your heart; I ask you to renounce a predilection which there is nothing to justify, to forget a fancy which, without resulting as you wish, will be fatal to all three of us."

"Ask me for my life, Mary; I can kill myself, or get myself killed,—nothing simpler than that, *mon Dieu!*—but don't ask me not to love you. Tell me what I should put in my poor heart to take the place of its love for you."

"Nevertheless it must be so, dear Michel," said Mary, in a caressing voice; "for you will never,—no, never!—obtain any encouragement from me in the love you mention in your letter: I have sworn it!"

"To whom, Mary?"

"To God and to myself."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" cried Michel; "and I dreamed that she loved me!"

Mary thought that her words ought to increase in coldness as her lover's became more excited.

"All that I say to you, my friend," said she, "is dictated not by my reason alone, but by my lively interest in you. If you were indifferent to me, I should consider, believe me, that it was enough to express my sentiments to you by the coldness of my manner; but that's not the case. No, it is as a friend that I come to you and say, 'Forget her who can never be yours, Michel, and love her who loves you,—her to whom you are, in a certain sense, betrothed.'"

"Oh, but you know very well that the engagement was a surprise; you know very well that Petit-Pierre,

when he made the request, was misled as to my real feelings. What those feelings are, you are well aware; I expressed them to you plainly enough the night the soldiers took possession of the château. You did not reject them; I felt your hands return my pressure; I was at your knees as I am now, Mary! Your head was bent toward me; your hair, your lovely hair, your adored hair brushed my forehead! I was at fault in not telling Petit-Pierre which of the two was my beloved; but what would you have! I never fancied that any one could think of my loving another woman than Mary. It is the fault of my cursed timidity; but, after all, it's not such a heinous fault that it ought to separate me forever from the woman I love, and bind me for life to her whom I love not!"

"Alas! my friend, the fault which seems to you so trivial, seems irreparable to me. Whatever happens, even though you should break the promise made in your name, and to which you assented by your silence, you must understand that I can never be yours, that I will never decide to rend my beloved sister's heart with the sight of my happiness."

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" cried Michel, "what a miserable wretch I am!"

He hid his face in his hands and burst into tears.

"Yes," said Mary, — "yes, I believe that you are suffering keenly at this moment; but have a little virtue, a little courage, a little energy, my friend, pray do! and listen coolly to what I say. This sentiment will gradually fade away out of your heart. If need be, to hasten your cure, I will go away myself."

"You go away! you leave me! No, Mary,—no, never! No, don't leave me; for I swear to you that the day you go, I go; wherever you go, I follow you. *Mon*

Dieu! what would become of me, deprived of your sweet presence? No, no, no! don't go away, Mary, I implore you!"

"So be it, I will stay here; but only to help you to do whatever your duty demands of you that is hard or painful; and when it is done, when you are happy, when you are Bertha's husband—"

"Never! never!" muttered Michel.

"Yes, my friend; for Bertha will be a much more suitable wife for you than I. Her affection for you—I, who have heard her give expression to it, assure you—is greater than you could possibly conceive; that affection will satisfy your consuming need of being loved, and the strength of will and energy, which my sister has, but which are lacking in me, will clear away from your path the obstacles, which you, perhaps, would not have the strength to thrust aside yourself. So that your sacrifice, if it is a sacrifice, will be abundantly rewarded."

While uttering these words, Mary had struggled to preserve a calmness of demeanor which her heart was far from feeling; its real state was betrayed by her pallor and agitation.

Michel heard her through with feverish impatience.

"Don't speak in that way!" he cried when she had finished. "Do you imagine that the course of one's affections is a thing to be decided on beforehand, that one can guide them at will, as an engineer guides the waters of a river between the banks of a canal, as a gardener trains a vine against a wall according to his fancy? No, no, I tell you again, and I will say it a thousand times, it is you, you alone, whom I love, Mary! It would be impossible for my heart to utter any other name than yours, even should I wish to; and I do not wish to! *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" the youth

continued, throwing up his arms despairingly, "what would become of me if I should see you married to another?"

"Michel," Mary replied with much excitement, "if you do what I ask, I swear to you by the most sacred and solemn oaths, that since I can never be yours, I will never belong to any other, save God alone! I will never marry; all my affection will remain yours, and it will cease to be a mere common passion which lapse of time can weaken, or an accident destroy. It will be the profound, unalterable attachment of a sister for her brother; it will be the everlasting gratitude which will bind me to you forever. I shall owe to you my sister's happiness, and my whole life will be passed in blessing you."

"But your affection for Bertha leads you astray, Mary," urged Michel; "your mind is utterly absorbed by her. You have no thought for me when you propose to condemn me to the frightful torture of being chained for life to a woman whom I do not love. Oh, it's cruel of you, Mary,— you for whom I would lay down my life,— to ask of me a thing which I can never resign myself to do."

"Oh, yes, my friend," she persisted, "you will resign yourself to what may perhaps be a caprice of fate, but will surely be a generous and magnanimous act; you will resign yourself to it, because you will realize that God cannot let such a sacrifice go unrewarded, and because the reward will be the happiness of two poor motherless girls."

"Oh, Mary, stop!" said Michel, beside himself. "Say no more to me of that. Oh, how easy it is to see that you have no idea what it is to love! You tell me to give you up! Why, just think that you are my heart, my soul, and my very life; that it is neither more

nor less than asking me to tear my heart from my breast, to abjure my own soul; that it is to extinguish my happiness, and dry up my stream of life at its source! You are the light, for which and by which the world is what it is; and when you no longer shine upon my life, I shall sink at once into an abyss, whose gloomy depths horrify me! I swear to you, Mary, that ever since I have known you, since the first moment my eyes rested on you, since I first felt your cool touch on my bleeding forehead, you have been so identified with myself in my mind that I have no thought which does not belong to you; that everything in me is indissolubly connected with you; that, if my heart should lose your image, it would at once cease to beat, as if the life-giving principle had been withdrawn from it. You see that I absolutely cannot do as you wish!"

"But if Bertha loves you, and I do not!" cried Mary in a paroxysm of despair.

"Ah, if you don't love me, Mary; if you have the courage to say to me, eye to eye, and your hand in mine, 'I do not love you,'—why, then, it's all over!"

"What do you mean by saying 'It's all over'?"

"Oh, it's very simple, Mary! As truly as those stars shining in heaven see the purity and sanctity of my love for you, as truly as God who sits above the stars knows that my love for you is immortal, Mary, neither you nor your sister will ever see me again."

"What are you saying, wretched boy?"

"I say that I have only to cross the lake, a matter of ten minutes; that I have only to mount my horse which is standing among the osiers, and gallop off to the nearest encampment,—a matter of ten minutes more; that then I have only to say, 'I am Baron Michel de la Logerie,' and in three hours I shall be shot."

Mary uttered a cry.

"And that is just what I will do," added Michel, "as surely as those stars look down at us, as surely as they lie beneath God's feet."

As he finished, Michel made as if to leave the hut.

Mary threw herself in front of him, and seized him in her arms; but her strength failed her, and she slipped down on her knees.

"Michel," she murmured, "if you love me as you say, you will not deny my prayer. In the name of your love, I, whom you say that you love, implore you not to kill my sister! Grant her life and her happiness to my tears and my prayers. God will give you his blessing for it; for every day my heart will go out to him in entreaties for the happiness of the man who has helped me to save her whom I love better than myself! Michel, forget me! In pity's name, I beseech you, forget me, and do not drive Bertha to the despair in which I seem already to see her plunged!"

"Oh, Mary, Mary, how cruel you are!" the young man cried, seizing his hair, and pulling it out by the handful. "It's my life that you ask of me! I shall surely die if I lose you!"

"Courage, my friend, courage!" said the maiden, visibly growing weaker herself.

"I would have courage enough to do anything except give you up; but the mere thought of that makes me weaker than a baby, more desperate than a condemned man."

"Michel, my dear friend, will you do what I ask?" faltered Mary, her voice choked with tears.

"Well —"

He was about to say yes, but checked himself.

"Oh," he cried, "if I only knew that you were suffering as I am!"

At this, the very apotheosis of selfishness, but of love as well, Mary, gasping for breath, completely beside herself, half mad, strained Michel to her heart in a close embrace, and said in a voice broken with sobs: —

“You say, then, poor boy, that it would comfort you to know that my heart is torn as yours is?”

“Yes, yes, oh, yes!”

“You think that hell would become paradise, if I were there by your side?”

“Everlasting suffering with you, Mary, I accept without hesitation.”

“Very well, then,” cried Mary, distractedly, “be content, cruel child! your suffering, your agony find an echo in my heart. Like you, I die of despair at the thought of the sacrifice which duty calls upon us to make!”

“Then you do love me, Mary?” Michel asked.

“Oh, ungrateful!” continued she; “ungrateful to see my prayers, my tears, and my agony, and not to see my love!”

“Oh, Mary, Mary!” said Michel, breathless, drunken, and wild with joy, “after you have killed me with grief, do you want to kill me with happiness?”

“Yes, yes, I love you!” repeated Mary, — “I love you! I must say, and say again, the words which have been stifling me so long. I love you as dearly as you can possibly love me; I love you so much that, when I think of the sacrifice we must make, death would seem inexpressibly sweet to me, if it would come upon me as I make the confession.”

As she spoke, involuntarily, and as if impelled by magnetic force, Mary put her face close to Michel's, who was gazing at her with the gaze of a man intoxicated by an hallucination. Her fair hair caressed the young man's

brow; their breaths mingled, and each drank of the other's and grew drunken with it. Soon Michel, as if overpowered by his emotion, closed his eyes; at that supreme moment his mouth met Mary's, and she, exhausted by her long struggle against herself, yielded to the irresistible power which drew her on. Their lips were joined, and for some moments they were lost in the depths of sorrowful ecstasy.

Mary first recovered herself.

She rose quickly, pushed Michel away, and without transition, burst into tears.

At this moment, Rosine entered the hut.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEREIN BARON MICHEL FINDS AN OAK INSTEAD OF A REED TO LEAN UPON.

MARY felt that God had sent Rosine to her assistance.

Alone, with no one to lean upon, and having betrayed herself as she had done, she felt that she was at her lover's mercy.

She ran up to Rosine.

"What's the matter, my child?" she asked, taking her hand. "What brings you here?"

She passed her hand across her brow to hide her blushes, and over her eyes to wipe away her tears.

"Mademoiselle," said Rosine, "I thought I heard the sound of oars."

"In which direction?"

"Toward Saint Philbert."

"I had an idea that your father's boat was the only one on the lake."

"No, mademoiselle; there is one that belongs to the miller of Grand-Lieu. It's all stove in, to be sure; but it's that one that they're using to come over here."

"All right," said Mary, "I will go with you, Rosine."

Without noticing the baron, who held out his arms supplicatingly to her, Mary, not sorry for an excuse to leave him and collect her ideas and her courage, darted out of the cabin, followed by Rosine.

Michel remained alone, completely crushed. He felt that the chance of happiness was slipping away from

him, and that he was powerless to retain it. Never again would such a crisis bring about such another confession!

When Mary returned, after straining her ears in every direction, without hearing anything save the rippling of the water on the shore, she found Michel sitting on the reeds, with his head in his hands.

She thought he was calm. He was only down-hearted.

She went to him.

When he heard her step, he raised his head; and seeing that she had returned as cool and reserved as she was excited when she left him, he extended his hand, and said, with a mournful shake of his head,—

“Oh, Mary! Mary!”

“Well, my friend?” she asked.

“In Heaven’s name, say again those sweet, intoxicating words! Tell me again that you love me!”

“I will tell you so over and over again, my friend,” replied Mary, sadly, “as many times as you choose, if the assurance that my love follows with the deepest solicitude every pang that you suffer and every effort that you make will serve to inspire you with courage and resolution.”

“What!” exclaimed Michel, wringing his hands; “you still think of this cruel separation? You still desire that, with my consciousness of my love for you and my certainty of your love for me, I should give myself to another?”

“I wish that we should both do what I regard as a sacred duty, my friend. That is why I do not regret having opened my heart to you; for I hope that my example will teach you how to suffer, and to resign yourself to the will of God. A fatal combination of circumstances, which I deplore no less than you, Michel, keeps us apart. We cannot belong to one another.”

"Oh, but why? I have entered into no engagement. I never told Mademoiselle Bertha that I loved her."

"No; but she told me that she loves you. She confided in me the evening you met her at Tinguy's cabin, — the evening you came home with her."

"But every tender word I said to her that evening," cried the unhappy youth, "was really meant for you."

"What would you have, my friend? A heart which opens of itself is very easy to fill. She deceived herself, poor Bertha! And when we were going into the château that night, just as I was saying to myself, 'I love him!' she said the same words to me aloud. To love you is only suffering; to be yours, Michel, would be a crime."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*"

"Yes, call upon Him. He will give us strength, Michel, — this merciful God whom we invoke will give us strength. Let us, then, submit heroically to the consequences of our mutual timidity. I do not blame you for yours; pray, don't think I do. I do not blame you for not making known your sentiments when there was still time. But, at least, do not cause me to suffer remorse for having ruined my sister's life without profit or benefit to myself."

"But your plan is perfectly insane!" said Michel. "The very thing you want to avoid will happen, as sure as fate. Bertha, sooner or later, will see that I don't love her, and then —"

"Listen to me, my friend," Mary interrupted, laying her hand on Michel's arm. "Although I am very young, I have very definite convictions as to what is called love. My education, utterly different from yours, had drawbacks, as yours did; but it also had certain advantages. One of those advantages — a terrible one, I know

— is the habit I have acquired of looking at things from a realistic point of view. Accustomed to listen to conversation in which no past weaknesses were glossed over, I know, from what I have learned of my father's life, that nothing is more fleeting than such attachments as this you feel for me. Therefore I hope and trust that Bertha will have taken my place in your heart before she has had time to remark your indifference. That is my only hope, Michel. I beseech you not to deprive me of it."

"You ask an impossibility of me, Máry."

"Very well; so be it! You are free not to keep the engagement which binds you to my sister. You are free to spurn the prayer I offer on my knees. It will be another dishonor for two poor children, already so cruelly slandered by the world! My poor Bertha will suffer, I know; but, at all events, I shall suffer with her, from the same source of grief. And beware, Michel; perhaps our mutual sufferings, each working upon the other, may end by cursing you."

"I beg you, Mary, I implore you not to say such heart-rending words to me."

"Listen, Michel. The hours are flying, the night is wearing away. Daybreak will soon be here, when we must part; and my resolution is irrevocable. We have both dreamed a dream which we must forget. I have told you how you can earn, I will not say my love, for that you already have, but the everlasting gratitude of poor Mary. I solemnly swear to you," she added, in more supplicating tones than she had yet used, — "I swear to you that if you devote your life to my sister's happiness, I will have but one prayer in my heart: a prayer to God Almighty to reward you in full measure on earth and in heaven! If, on the other hand, you refuse,

Michel, if your heart fails to rise to the level of my abnegation, I must cease to see you. You must go away; for once more I say, I swear before God, in the absence of men, that never, my friend, will I be yours!"

"Mary, Mary, take no such oath as that! Leave me hope, at least. The obstacles which keep us asunder may yet be smoothed away."

"To leave you hope would be a mistake too, Michel. And since the certainty that I share your suffering fails to impart the firmness and resignation which I possess, I bitterly regret the mistake you have made me commit to-night. No," the maiden continued, passing her hand across her brow, "let us not indulge in dreams any longer; they are too dangerous. I have prayed to you with all my force, and you remain unmoved. Nothing remains for me but to say farewell to you forever."

"Not see you any more, Mary! Oh, far better death! I will obey you. What do you demand of me —"

He stopped. He had not the strength to continue.

"I demand nothing," said Mary. "On my knees I have asked you not to break two hearts instead of one, and on my knees I ask it still."

As she spoke, she kneeled at his feet.

"Rise, Mary, rise!" he cried. "Yes, yes, I will do whatever you wish. But you will be there; you will never leave us, will you? And when I suffer too keenly, I will draw from your glance the strength and courage which I lack. I will obey you, Mary!"

"Thanks, my friend, thanks! And I ask and accept this sacrifice at your hands because of my conviction that it will not be wasted, in respect of your own happiness any more than of Bertha's."

"But you, — what about you?" he cried.

"Don't think of me, Michel."

The young man groaned aloud.

"God," continued Mary, "has endowed the spirit of devotion with consolations whose depths the human mind cannot sound. I," she went on, shading her eyes with her hand, as if fearing that they would give the lie to her words, — "I will strive to be content with the sight of your happiness."

"Oh, *mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !*" groaned Michel, wringing his hands, "the die is cast, and I am condemned."

He hid his face against the boards of the hut, just as Rosine came in.

"Mademoiselle," said she, "day is beginning to break."

"What's the matter, Rosine, pray?" asked Mary.

"You are all of a tremble."

"Why, just the same way that I thought I heard the noise of oars on the lake awhile ago, I thought this moment that I heard steps behind me."

"Steps behind you on this islet, planted here in the middle of the lake? You were dreaming, my child!"

"I think I must have been; for I looked all about, and saw no one."

"Let us go, then!" said Mary.

A sob from Michel made her turn around.

"We are going to leave the island, alone, my friend," said she, "and in an hour Rosine will come back for you with the boat. Don't forget your promise to me. I rely upon your courage."

"Rely upon my love, Mary. The proof of it which you ask is terrible, and the task you impose upon me a frightful one. God grant that I may not fall beneath the load!"

"Remember that Bertha loves you, Michel; remem-

ber that she will follow jealously your every look. Remember, finally, that I would rather die than have her discover the real state of your heart."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" muttered the young man.

"Come, be brave! Adieu, my friend!"

Seizing a moment when Rosine was peeping out through the half-open door, Mary leaned over and imprinted a kiss on Michel's forehead.

It was very different from the one she had let him take a half-hour before.

The one was the jet of flame which darts from the heart of the lover to the heart of his beloved; the other was the chaste farewell of a sister to her brother.

Michel fully realized the distinction, for this last caress made his heart sad. Tears gushed anew from his eyes. He escorted the two girls to the shore; and when they had embarked, he sat upon a stone and watched them recede, until they were lost to sight in the morning mist which lay upon the lake.

He could still hear the oars; and he was listening to them, as to the knell of the illusions he had so long cherished, now vanished like ghosts, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder.

He turned, and saw Jean Oullier standing behind him.

The Vendean's face was more gloomy than usual; but, at all events, it had lost that expression of hatred which Michel had always previously noticed.

His eyes were moist, and great tear-drops were shining in the fringe of beard which framed his visage.

Were they dew-drops, or had Charette's old trooper been shedding tears?

He held out his hand to Michel, — something he had never done before.

Michel gazed wonderingly at him, and took the offered hand with some hesitation.

"I heard everything," said Oullier.

Michel sighed, and hung his head.

"You are brave-hearted children!" added Jean. "But you are right in saying that it is a terrible task the child has made you undertake. May God reward her devotion! As for yourself, if you feel your resolution weakening, just let me know, Monsieur de la Logerie, and you will learn one thing,—if Jean Oullier hates his foes bitterly, he also loves dearly those whom he loves at all."

"Thanks," was Michel's reply.

"Come, come," rejoined Jean, "don't weep! Weeping is n't a man's part! And if necessary, I will try to make that *tête de fer*—otherwise called Bertha—listen to reason; although, I tell you beforehand, it will not be an easy matter."

"But in case she will not listen to reason, there is one thing which will be very easy to do, especially if you will help me a bit."

"What is it?" asked Jean.

"For me to get killed," said Michel.

He said it so simply that Jean knew it expressed his real thought.

"Oho!" he muttered. "Faith! he has the appearance of being ready to do as he says."

"Very well," said he to the baron; "when we get to that point, we'll see."

This promise, despite its melancholy nature and subject, restored Michel's pluck, to some extent.

"You can't stay here," remarked the old keeper, "so let's go. I have a wretched, leaky boat here; but, with some care, it will take us both ashore."

"But Rosine is to come for me in an hour."

"She will come for nothing," retorted Jean. "It will teach her not to talk about other people's business on the high-road, as she did with you last night."

After these words, which satisfactorily explained how Jean Oullier happened to come to the islet of La Jonchère, he and Michel went to the boat, and immediately headed for Saint Philbert, following a different course from that taken by Rosine and Mary.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST CHEVALIERS.

As Gaspard had shrewdly foreseen, and told Petit-Pierre, the postponement of the uprising to the 4th June proved a fatal blow to the projected insurrection.

Notwithstanding the diligence and activity exhibited by the Legitimist leaders, who did, every one, as we have seen the Marquis de Souday and his daughters do, and the faithful hearts who were present at Banlœuvre, — that is to say, they visited in person the villages of their respective divisions with the new orders, — it was too late for them to be known in all the districts to be included in the movement.

Toward Niort, Fontenay, Luçon, the Royalists had already assembled. Diot and Robert, at the head of their organized bands, had emerged from the forests of Deux-Sèvres, to serve as a nucleus for the uprising. Their movements were reported to the commandants of the military cantonments, who marched upon the parish of Amailloux, overpowered the peasants, and arrested a large number of gentlemen and ex-officers, who had made arrangements to muster in that parish and had hastened thither at the noise of the firing.

Similar arrests were made in the neighborhood of Champ-Saint-Père. The post of Port-la-Claye was attacked; and although the assailants were so few in number that they were driven back, the audacity and energy with which the affair was managed forbade its being attributed to insurgents alone.

On one of the prisoners at Champ-Saint-Père they discovered a list of young people who were to compose a *corps d'élite*.

This list, these assaults made upon different points at the same hour, and the arrests of men known for their ultra-Royalist views were calculated to put the authorities on the alert and make them look more seriously upon the dangers which, up to that time, they had made but slight preparations to meet.

As the counter-order had even failed to reach some points in La Vendée and Deux-Sèvres in time, we can easily understand that in Bretagne and Maine, which were farther away than the Marais and Bocage from the centre whence the directions emanated, the standard of civil war had been openly unfurled.

In the first-named province, Vitré's division had an engagement, and even won a sort of victory over the Bretonnières in Bréal,—a fleeting victory, which changed to disaster next day at La Gaudinière.

Gaullier, in Maine, having likewise received the counter-order too late to stop his boys, fought a bloody battle at Chaney, which lasted not less than six hours. And in addition to that engagement, which was a serious one, the peasants, who in some places did not care to go home, exchanged shots almost every day with the flying columns which infested the country.

It may be boldly claimed that this counter-order of the 22d May, followed as it was by unseasonable and isolated movements, and leading inevitably to a failure of good understanding and confidence, was of greater value to the Government of July than the combined zeal of all its agents.

In those provinces where the assembled forces had disbanded, it was impossible to arouse again the ardor

which had been allowed to cool. The insurgents had had time to reason and reflect; and reflection, which is so generally favorable to wise judgment, is always fatal to sentiment.

The leaders, who had drawn the attention of the Government upon themselves, were easily surprised and arrested, upon returning to their homes.

It was even worse in those districts where the rebel bands appeared under arms. The peasants, finding themselves left to their own resources, and looking in vain for the assistance they had reckoned on, cried treason, broke their gun-barrels, and sought their firesides, angry and sullen.

The Legitimist insurrection miscarried before it had left the embryonic stage. The cause of Henri V. lost two provinces before its flag was unfurled; La Vendée was left to carry on the struggle alone; but such was the courage of these sons of the giants that they did not yet despair, as we shall see.

A week had elapsed since the events we narrated in the last chapter; and during that week the political excitement about Machecoul had been so engrossing that it had completely absorbed those characters of our story, whose private passions seemed most likely to make them completely indifferent to it.

Bertha, whom Michel's disappearance had disturbed for a moment, had regained her serenity when he returned to her side; and her happiness was expressed so expansively and openly that it was impossible for him, except by breaking his promise to Mary, to appear otherwise than happy to be with her again.

Moreover, her constant attendance upon Petit-Pierre and the innumerable details of the correspondence which was carried on by her so occupied every moment of

Bertha's time that they prevented her noticing the melancholy and down-heartedness of Michel, and the constraint with which he submitted to the familiar manners which the maiden, with her masculine ways, felt justified in assuming toward the man whom she looked upon as her betrothed.

Mary, who had joined her father and sister two hours after leaving Michel on La Jonchère, consistently avoided being left alone with the latter. When the necessities of their life brought them together, she exerted her ingenuity to the utmost, and in every possible way, to make her sister's charms and accomplishments shine in his eyes. When her glance met his, she would gaze at him with an imploring expression, which was at once a gentle and a cruel reminder of the promise he had made her.

If, perchance, Michel's silence seemed to welcome the attentions, of which Bertha was so lavish in his regard, Mary immediately affected noisy and demonstrative delight, which she was far from feeling in her heart, doubtless, but which was none the less heart-rending to Michel.

Meanwhile, despite her endeavors, it was impossible for her to conceal the ravages caused in her outward appearance by her fierce struggle with her love.

The change would have struck those about her if they had been less absorbed, whether in their own happiness, like Bertha, or in political cares, like Petit-Pierre and the Marquis de Souday.

Poor Mary's freshness and bloom had disappeared. Large, dark rings surrounded her sunken eyes; her pale cheeks fell away perceptibly, and the smile which her lips constantly assumed was belied by the wrinkles which roughened her fair brow.

Jean Oullier, whose watchful solicitude would have detected her misery, was, unfortunately, absent. The very day of his return to Banlœuvre, he had been sent by M. de Souday on a mission to the eastward. And being altogether without experience in affairs of the heart, he had taken his departure, almost easy in mind; for he was far from suspecting, notwithstanding what he had heard, that the difficulty was so serious.

It was the 3d June.

On that day there was great commotion in and about the Jacquet mill in the commune of Saint Colombin.

Since early morning the stream of women and beggars going and coming had been without end; and as darkness fell, the orchard in front of the farmhouse bore all the appearance of a camp.

Every moment, men clad in blouses or hunting-coats and armed with guns, swords, and pistols arrived at the mill, some across the fields and some by the roads. They would say a word to the sentinels spread out around the farm, and were thereupon allowed to pass. They stacked their arms along the hedge which separated the orchard from the yard, and, like former arrivals, prepared to camp under the apple-trees. The devotion of all was absolute, but few indulged in hope.

Brave and loyal convictions are sacred and deserving of respect; whatever one's private opinions, one is proud to acknowledge such convictions in one's friend, and happy to find them in one's foes.

The political beliefs in support of which these men were not afraid to die may be denied; God deserted them, and they were obliged to succumb; but they are entitled, even after their defeat, to be honored without being compelled to pass through the Caudine Forks.

The ancients used to say, "*Vae victis!*" but the

ancients were pagans, and pity can not be relegated to the ranks of false gods.

For our own part, without regard to the sentiments which actuated them, we consider that the devotion which the Vendéans exhibited in the eyes of France in 1832 was noble and chivalrous, — France, which was already infected by the narrow, sordid, mercantile ideas, which have since enveloped her, — especially when we reflect that the greater part of the Vendéans indulged in no illusions as to the issue of the struggle, and went forth to certain death, without hope of attaining their object.

However, the names of these men belong henceforth to history; we say this much to absolve them at least, if not to glorify them, without allowing ourselves to draw them into our tale.

Within the Jacquet mill, the assembled company, although less numerous than that outside, was scarcely less noisy.

Some of the leaders were receiving their final instructions, and concerting plans for the morrow; the gentlemen were rehearsing the events of the day just past, which were of considerable moment, — namely, the assembling in force of the people of the Vergeries, and some brisk engagements with the Government troops.

The Marquis de Souday was very prominent among the groups by reason of his excitement and loquacity; he seemed to have gone back to his twentieth year. In his feverish impatience he thought that the next day's sun would never rise; and he made use of the time occupied by the earth in its revolution upon its axis, in giving lessons in tactics to the young people about him.

Michel, seated in the chimney-corner, was the only

person present whose mind was not completely absorbed by the preparations for the morrow.

Since the morning his situation had become complicated, for some of the neighbors and friends of the marquis had congratulated him upon his approaching union with Mademoiselle de Souday.

He felt as if, with every step that he took, he entangled himself more hopelessly in the meshes of the net, into which he had walked with his eyes shut; and unfortunately, he saw at the same time how powerless were all his efforts to keep the promise Mary had wrested from him, how vain his attempts to banish from his heart the lovely image which had taken possession thereof.

His gloom became more profound, and formed at the moment the strongest contrast to the animated features of those who stood about him.

The confusion and bustle which pervaded the room soon became insupportable to him; he rose and went out without attracting attention.

He crossed the mill-yard, and passing behind the wheel made his way into the miller's garden, followed the mill-stream, and sat down on the hand-rail of a little bridge, about two hundred feet from the house.

He had been sitting there nearly an hour, giving free rein to all the despondent ideas suggested to him by his consciousness of his unhappy situation, when he spied a man coming toward him along the same path by which he had himself come.

"Is that you, Monsieur Michel?" the new-comer inquired.

"Jean Oullier!" cried Michel, "Jean Oullier! Heaven must have sent you! How long since you returned?"

"Hardly half an hour."

"Did you see Mademoiselle Mary?"

"Yes I did."

The old keeper raised his eyes to heaven, with a deep sigh.

The tone in which he uttered the words, the gesture and the sigh with which he accompanied them, indicated that his affectionate solicitude had not erred as to the cause of the young girl's depression, but appreciated at last the gravity of the crisis.

Michel so understood it; for he hid his face in his hands, and murmured simply,—

"Poor Mary!"

Jean Oullier listened pityingly; after a moment's silence he asked,—

"Have you made any definite plans?"

"No, and I hope to-morrow a bullet will make it unnecessary for me to take that trouble."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Oullier; "you mustn't count on that; bullets are whimsical, and never visit those who call for them."

"Oh, Monsieur Jean," said Michel, shaking his head, "we are very miserable!"

"Yes, it does seem to torment you people terribly, this thing which you call love, but which is really only infatuation! *Mon Dieu!* who could ever have thought that those two children, who never used to think of anything but riding about through the woods, boldly and gracefully, between their father and myself, would go mad over the first being with a hat on his head that they met on the road, and all because he resembled a girl as strongly as their ways resemble those of young men!"

"Alas! it's all fate, my poor Jean."

"No," retorted the Vendean, "you must not attribute it to fate, but to me. But tell me, as you have n't the courage to speak to that mad creature Bertha, have you the pluck to remain honorable?"

"I will do whatever is necessary to be near Mary; rely upon me so long as you have that end in view."

"Who said anything about your being near Mary? Poor, dear child! she has more common-sense than all the rest of you. She cannot be your wife,—she told you so the other day (I should say the other night),—and she was a hundred times right; but her love for Bertha carried her too far. She proposes to condemn herself to the torture she desires to spare her sister; and that is something that neither you nor I ought to allow."

"How can we prevent it, Jean Oullier?"

"In a very simple way. Just because you cannot be hers whom you do love, you must not think of being hers whom you do not love. My idea is that the chagrin of the former will end by dying away; for no matter what she may say, a woman is always a little jealous at bottom, no matter how pure her heart really is."

"As for renouncing the hope of calling Mary my wife, and at the same time the comfort of looking at her, I cannot do it. Look you, Jean Oullier, to remain by Mary's side, I believe I would go through hell-fire."

"All that is mere talk, my young gentleman. Men are soon consoled for being turned out of paradise; when one is as young as you, it's easy to forget the woman one loves. Besides, it's a very different thing from hell-fire that is likely to keep you and Mary apart. It may be her sister's dead body; for you haven't yet begun to know that unmanageable child, whose name is Bertha, nor what she is capable of! I have no conception, poor peasant that I am, of your

grand passions; but it seems to me that the most determined should hesitate before an obstacle of that nature."

"But what am I to do, my friend? What am I to do? Advise me!"

"All the trouble arises, in my opinion at least, from the fact that you have n't the characteristics of your sex. You must do as the sex to which your demeanor and weakness seem to stamp you as belonging, would do in similar circumstances. You have failed to rise superior to the embarrassments of the situation in which chance has placed you; you must therefore fly from it!"

"Fly? Why, did n't you hear Mary tell me the other day that she would never see me again after the moment that I threw her sister over?"

"What's the difference, if she esteems you?"

"But all that I shall suffer —"

"You won't suffer any more at a distance than here."

"Here I can, at least, see her."

"Do you think that the heart knows aught of distance? — no, not even the distance which lies between us and those to whom we have said a last farewell. Take my own case: it's thirty years and more since I lost my poor wife, yet there are days when I see her as plainly as I see you. You will carry away Mary's image in your heart, and hear her voice thanking you for what you have done."

"Oh, I should much prefer to have you talk of my death."

"Come, Monsieur Michel, be a man! Look! if necessary, I myself, who have strong grounds for hating you, will fall at your knees and say, 'I implore you to do what you can toward restoring the peace of mind of these poor creatures.'"

"What is it you want me to do?"

"You must go away; I said so before, and I say it again."

"Go away? Why, you don't reflect that there is to be fighting to-morrow; to go away to-day would be desertion, and I should be disgraced forever."

"No, I have no desire to disgrace you. If you go, it will not be desertion."

"How so?"

"As there is no parish captain of the Clisson division, I have been designated to take his place; you can come with me."

"Oh, I wish the first ball might be for me to-morrow."

"You will fight under my eyes," continued Jean; "and if any one doubts it, I will bear witness to it. Will you come?"

"Yes," Michel replied, in so low a tone that the old man could hardly hear him.

"Good! in three hours we will start."

"Must I go without bidding her good-by?"

"You must. In view of impending events, who knows whether she would be strong enough to let you go? Come, where's your pluck?"

"It's there, Jean Oullier; you will be content with me."

"I can rely upon you, then?"

"I give you my word."

"In three hours I shall expect you at Belle-Passe cross-roads."

"I will be there."

Jean Oullier waved his hand to Michel with something very like friendliness, and crossed the little bridge into the orchard, where he joined the other Vendéans.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEREIN JEAN OULLIER LIES FOR THE GOOD
OF THE CAUSE.

THE baron remained for some minutes in a sort of stupor. Jean Oullier's words were ringing in his ears like his own death-knell.

He thought he must have been dreaming, and to convince himself of the reality of his misfortune, he had to keep saying to himself over and over again, —

“I must go away! go away!”

Thereupon, the mere idea of death, which up to that time he had looked upon only in the light of a possible and much to be desired relief from Heaven, which he had thought about only as one thinks of such subjects at twenty years, seemed to make his heart stand still.

A cold shiver passed through his body.

He saw himself parted from Mary, no longer by an obstacle which he might hope to overcome, but by the wall of imperishable granite which imprisons man forever in his last resting-place.

His agony became so intense that he felt as if it must forebode speedy death.

Then he accused Jean Oullier of harshness and injustice; it seemed to him hateful of the old Vendean to rob him of the consolation of one last look; it seemed incredible that he should be denied the privilege of a last farewell; he rebelled against the decree, and determined to see Mary once more, whatever might be the result.

Michel was perfectly familiar with the arrangement of the mill.

Petit-Pierre occupied the miller's room, situated over the mill-stones; it was naturally the state-chamber of the house.

The two sisters slept together in a closet adjoining that room; it had a narrow window which looked out over the outer of the wheels which drove the machinery.

The latter was at rest for the time; it had been shut down lest the noise it made when in operation might prevent the sentries from hearing other noises.

Michel waited for the darkness, — a matter of an hour or more.

When it was dark he approached the buildings.

There was a light in the little room.

He laid a board across to one of the paddles, and then climbed from paddle to paddle to the highest point of the wheel, where he was on a level with the narrow window.

He raised his head, and looked into the room.

Mary was alone, sitting on a stool, her elbow on the bed, and her head buried in her hands.

From time to time she uttered a deep sigh; from time to time her lips moved as if in whispered prayer.

She raised her head when her lover knocked on the glass, recognized him, and ran to the window with a little shriek.

"Hush!" he said.

"You! you here!" cried Mary.

"Yes, it's I."

"*Mon Dieu!* why have you come?"

"Mary, for a week I have n't spoken to you; it's almost a week since I saw you. I have come now to say good-by to you, before I go where my destiny calls me."

"Good-by! Why good-by?"

"I have come to say good-by to you, Mary," the young man said again with decision.

"Oh, you are not still thinking about dying?"

Michel made no reply.

"Oh, no, you are not going to die," Mary continued.

"I have prayed so earnestly to-night that God must have heard me. But, now that you have seen me, and spoken to me, go! go!"

"Why should I leave you so quickly? Do you hate me so that you can't bear to see me?"

"No, it's not that, my friend," said Mary, "but Bertha is in the next room; she may have seen you come, and may hear you talking. *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* what will become of me then? — for I swore to her that I did not love you."

"Yes, yes, you did swear it to her; but you have sworn to me that you do love me, and it was only because I was sure of your love that I consented to conceal my own."

"Michel, I implore you, go!"

"No, Mary, no. I will not go until I have heard again from your mouth the words you said to me in the hut on La Jonchère."

"But that love is almost a crime!" cried Mary, despairingly. "Michel, my friend, it makes my cheeks burn and my tears flow to think that I was weak enough to yield for an instant."

"I will arrange matters, Mary, I swear, so that to-morrow you will have no more occasion for such regret,—no more tears to shed."

"You mean to die! Oh, don't say that, I beseech you! Don't say that to me, when I am suffering so keenly, in the hope that my suffering will procure

for you a destiny far happier than mine. But did n't you hear that noise? Some one is coming. Go Michel, go!"

"One kiss, Mary!"

"No."

"Just one kiss — the last!"

"Never, my friend."

"Mary, it's a dead man who asks you for it."

Mary uttered a cry; her lips breathed upon the young man's brow; but just as she closed the window, the door opened, and Bertha appeared on the threshold.

She saw her sister pale, bewildered, hardly able to stand, and with the keen instinct of jealousy she ran to the window, threw it violently open, leaned out, and saw a shadow gliding along the wall of the house.

"It was Michel, Mary!" she cried, with trembling lips.

"My sister," said Mary, falling on her knees, "I swear to you —"

"Don't swear; don't lie; I recognized his voice."

She pushed Mary aside with such force that she fell over upon the floor. Then, leaping over her sister's body, like a lioness whose whelps have been stolen from her, she rushed from the room, and down the stairway, and tore through the mill into the yard.

There, to her utter amazement, she saw Michel sitting on the stoop beside Jean Oullier.

"Have you been there long?" she asked him in a short, abrupt voice.

Michel waved his hand toward Oullier, as much as to say, "I leave it for Jean Oullier to answer."

"For something like three quarters of an hour M. Michel has done me the honor to talk with me," said the Vendean.

Bertha looked searchingly at him.

"It's very strange!" said she.

"Why strange?" demanded Jean, returning Bertha's gaze.

"Because just this moment," said she, addressing Michel, "I thought I heard you talking with my sister at the window, and saw you climbing down the wheel, which you had previously climbed up to get where you could talk to her."

"M. le Baron's appearance makes it extremely likely that he would risk such feats as that, I must say," was Jean's retort.

"But who do you suppose it was, then, Jean?" said Bertha, tapping her foot, impatiently.

"Oh, pshaw! some drunken wretch who thought it would be a clever thing to do."

"But I tell you that Mary was pale, trembling, and excited."

"With fear!" said Oullier. "Don't you know that she is n't a 'break-all' like you?"

Bertha stood lost in thought.

She knew Jean Oullier's prejudice against the baron, and could not believe that he would take his part against her.

In a few moments her thoughts returned to Mary; she remembered that she had left her half fainting.

"Yes," said she,—"yes, Jean Oullier, you are right; the poor child was afraid, and I, with my brutality, put the finishing touch to her agitation. Oh, this passion makes me really mad!"

Without another word to Michel or Jean, she darted into the mill again.

Jean Oullier looked at Michel, who lowered his eyes.

"I will not reproach you," said he, "but you see what

a powder-magazine you 're walking on ! What would have happened if I had n't been at hand to lie for you,— God forgive me! — as if I had never done anything else in my life ? ”

“ You are right, Jean,” said Michel, “ and I will prove that I mean what I say now, by going with you — I swear it! — for I see well enough that it 's impossible for me to stay here any longer.”

“ Good ! The Nantes men are just about to march, and the marquis is to join them with his division ; do you start when they do, but keep a little behind, and wait for me — you know where.”

Michel went to get his horse ready, and meanwhile Jean reported to the marquis for his final instructions.

The Vendéans who were in camp in the orchard formed in marching order ; weapons gleamed in the darkness ; a movement of respectful eagerness to be off passed through the ranks.

Soon Petit-Pierre, followed by the principal leaders, came out of the house and approached the Vendéans. She was no sooner recognized than loud and enthusiastic shouts issued from every mouth, and swords were drawn in salutation to her for whom they were ready to march to their death.

“ My friends,” said Petit-Pierre coming forward, “ I promised that I would be among you at the first uprising ; here I am, and I will never desert you. For good or evil, our fates are one henceforth. If I cannot rally you around my helmet, as my son would do, I can at least die with you, as he would do ! Forward then, sons of the giants ! Go where honor and duty call you ! ”

Frenzied cries of “ *Vive Henri V !* ” “ *Vive Marie Caroline !* ” welcomed her appeal. She then said a

few words to such of the chiefs as she knew; after which the little troop, on whose fate hung the destiny of the oldest of European monarchies, set out in the direction of Vieille-Vigne.

Meanwhile Bertha was lavishing upon Mary affectionate attentions which were the more assiduous in proportion to the keenness of her regret.

She laid her upon the bed and wiped her face with her handkerchief dipped in cool water.

Mary opened her eyes, looked around her without seeing, while her lips faltered Michel's name.

Her heart returned to life before her mind.

Bertha started in spite of herself. She was on the point of asking Mary's forgiveness for her passion, but at that name the words died on her lips.

For the second time the serpent of jealousy was gnawing at her heart.

At this moment the acclamations with which the Vendéans received Petit-Pierre's words reached her ear. She ran to the window, and saw a dark mass brightened by glistening weapons moving among the trees.

It was the column beginning its march.

It then occurred to her that Michel had taken his leave without saying good-by to her, and she returned to her seat by Mary's bedside, her mind filled with gloomy and anxious thoughts.

CHAPTER X.

WHEREIN JAILER AND PRISONER ESCAPE TOGETHER.

ON the 4th June, at daybreak, the tocsin sounded on all the bells in the cantons of Clisson, Montaigu and Machecoul.

The tocsin is the Vendean's *la générale*.

In old times,—that is to say, in the great war,—its harsh and sinister peal ringing out over the fields was the signal for the entire population to rise and fall upon the enemy.

What grand things must that same population have done to have almost made us forget that its *enemy* was France!

But, fortunately — and this proves the tremendous progress we have made in forty years — in 1832 the clang of the tocsin seemed to have lost its power; and although a few peasants responded to its impious summons, and deserted the ploughshare for the gun hidden in the neighboring hedge, the vast majority peaceably continued the furrows they had begun, and were satisfied to listen to the signal of rebellion with the deeply meditative expression which sits so well upon the stern features of the Vendean peasant.

However, about ten o'clock in the morning, the insurgents assembled in considerable numbers, had a skirmish with some troops of the Line.

Strongly intrenched in the village of Maisdan, they gallantly sustained the assault that was made upon them,

and yielded only to the superior numbers of their opponents. Then they retired in better order than the Vendéans generally did, even after the slightest reverse.

At this time, we say again, they were no longer fighting for a great principle; it was unwavering devotion,—nothing more. If we have undertaken to write the history of this war, in such manner as we usually write history, it is because we hope to prove, from the very nature of the facts we record, that civil war will soon be an impossibility in France.

This devotion existed among a few men of high spirit and lofty courage, who thought themselves bound by the past history of their immediate ancestors, and who laid down honor, fortune, and life itself on the altar of the old adage, *Noblesse oblige*.

That explains why the retreat was so orderly and well executed. Those who directed it were not humble, undisciplined peasants, but *messieurs*; and each one of them was actuated, not by his devotion alone, but by his pride, a little on his own account, and very much for his companions.

Attacked again at Château Thébaud by a detachment of fresh troops, sent in pursuit of them by General Dermoncourt, the Whites lost some men crossing the Maine; but having succeeded in putting that stream between themselves and their pursuers, they were enabled to effect a junction on the other bank with the Nantais, whose departure in high spirits from the Jacquet mill we have described in an earlier chapter, and who had been overtaken by the Légé division and the Marquis de Souday's.

This reinforcement increased the effective force of the little column to about eight hundred men, all under the command of Gaspard.

The next morning they marched upon Vieille-Vigne, with the hope of disarming the National Guard; but the commander learned that the little hamlet was occupied by a force superior to his own, which might, furthermore, be reinforced at short notice by troops which Derroncourt was holding at Aigrefeuille, ready to march to any threatened point; so he determined to attack the village of Chêne with the intention of occupying and holding it.

The peasants were scattered about in the neighborhood, hidden in the grain which was already very high, and annoyed the Blues by a sharp fusillade, following the old-time tactics of their fathers.

The Nantais and the gentlemen, formed in column, prepared to carry the village by a sudden and impetuous attack by way of the broad street which runs through it.

At the foot of the street ran a stream, the bridge over which had been destroyed the night before, leaving only a few timbers here and there.

The soldiers, intrenched in the first houses, posted at the windows where they were protected by mattresses, poured upon the Whites a cross-fire which drove them back twice, and almost disheartened them; but suddenly, inspired by the example of their leaders, they threw themselves into the water, crossed the little stream, attacked the Blues at point of the bayonet, and drove them from house to house to the farther end of the village, where they found themselves face to face with a battalion of the Forty-fourth of the Line, which the general had sent to the assistance of the little garrison of Chêne.

Meanwhile the sound of the firing was heard at the Jacquet mill, where Petit-Pierre still was.

She was still in the room on the first floor where we located her in the last chapter.

With colorless cheeks, but blazing eyes, she was walking to and fro, devoured by feverish excitement which she could not control. From time to time she stood still on the threshold, listening to the dull roar which came to her on the breeze, like the grumbling of distant thunder; then she would pass her hand across her perspiring forehead, stamp angrily on the floor, and take her seat in the chimney-corner, opposite the Marquis de Souday, who, fully as agitated and impatient as she, vented his emotion in frequent mournful sighs.

How did it happen that the Marquis de Souday, whose impatient eagerness to duplicate the exploits of the great war we have remarked, was waiting in this state of expectancy? That is what we now propose to explain to the patient reader.

On the same day that the engagement at Maisdan took place, Petit-Pierre, in accordance with the promise she had made her friends, had made her preparations to join them in the field, fully determined to fight in their ranks.

But the Royalist chiefs shrank from the responsibility which her courage and ardor thrust upon them; they thought that such a course would put too much at hazard on the uncertain chances of the conflict. Consequently they decided that, until an army of respectable proportions should be got together, Petit-Pierre must not be allowed to risk her life in some obscure skirmish.

Respectful representations to that effect were thereupon made to her, but they were powerless against her stubborn determination.

Then the Vendean chiefs took counsel together and decided to keep her a prisoner, so to speak, and to leave one of themselves with her to keep her from leaving the house, even if it were necessary to use force.

Notwithstanding the zeal exhibited by the Marquis de Souday at the council, in scheming and voting for one of his colleagues, he was universally preferred for the place; and that is how, to his deep disgust and despair, he came to be at the Jacquet mill instead of at Chêne, at the miller's fire instead of exposed to the fire of the Blues.

When the first reports were heard at the mill, Petit-Pierre tried to induce the Marquis de Souday to permit her to join the Vendéans; but the old gentleman was not to be moved. Prayers, promises, threats, all had failed alike to shake his faithful adherence to his orders.

But Petit-Pierre noticed that the marquis, naturally a poor courtier, allowed his profound disgust to appear plainly on his features, even in the very act of refusing.

She halted in front of her keeper just as he indulged in one of the testy gestures we have mentioned.

"It would seem, Monsieur le Marquis," said she, "that you are not enjoying yourself beyond measure in my company."

"Oh," exclaimed the marquis, trying with poor success to impart an accent of deep indignation to the interjection.

"Why, yes," rejoined Petit-Pierre, who had a motive in persisting, "in my opinion you seem very far from ecstatic over the post of honor bestowed upon you."

"On the other hand," said the marquis, "I accepted it with the greatest gratitude, but —"

"Aha, you see there's a *but*," retorted Petit-Pierre, who seemed determined to make the old gentleman reveal the whole of his thought.

"Is there not a *but* in everything in the world?"

"Let us see what yours is."

"Well, I regret bitterly that I am not able to shed my

blood for you as my comrades are undoubtedly doing at this moment, and at the same time show myself deserving of the confidence they reposed in me."

Petit-Pierre sighed long and deep.

"Especially," said she, "as I have no doubt that your friends have reason to regret your absence; your experience and your courage would certainly have been of the very greatest assistance to them."

The marquis bridled up.

"Yes, yes," said he, "I am sure, too, that they have repented before this."

"I believe it; but will you permit me, my dear marquis, to tell you freely my real opinion?"

"Oh, I beg you to do so!"

"I think, do you see, that they are a little suspicious of you as well as of myself."

"Impossible!"

"Just wait a moment; you misunderstand me. They said to themselves, 'A woman will embarrass us in our marching; we shall have to look out for her in case of a retreat; we shall have to devote to the care and safety of her person, troops which might be profitably employed elsewhere.' They were not willing to believe that I have succeeded in overcoming the weakness of my body, and that my courage was equal to my task. Why should they not have had the same thoughts concerning you as they had about me?"

"About me!" cried M. de Souday, furious at the bare supposition; "why, I have proved my qualities, I should say!"

"Oh, everybody knows that, my dear marquis; but perhaps, considering your age, they have concluded, as in my case, that your bodily strength was no longer commensurate with your mental energy —"

"Oh, this is too much!" the marquis broke in, deeply indignant. "Why, there has n't been a day for fifteen years that I have n't been six or eight hours in the saddle, and sometimes ten, sometimes twelve! Why, for all my white hair, I don't know what fatigue is! Just see what I can still do!"

Seizing the stool upon which he was sitting, the marquis struck it against the chimney-piece with such violence that he broke the stool in a thousand pieces, and cruelly maltreated the chimney-piece.

"Well," said he, waving aloft the leg of the unlucky piece of furniture, "are there many of your young blades, Master Petit-Pierre, who could do as much?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Madame, "I take all that for granted, my dear marquis; so I am the first to say that these gentlemen did grievously wrong to treat you like an invalid."

"Like an invalid — I! *Mort Dieu!*" cried the marquis, working himself gradually into a rage, and completely forgetting the august presence in which he stood; "I, an invalid, indeed! This very evening I propose to go and tell them that I throw up these duties, which belong to a jailer, not to a gentleman."

"That's right!" said Petit-Pierre.

"These duties which I have been consigning to all the devils for two hours past, in my own mind!" continued the marquis, striding up and down the room.

"Aha!"

"And to-morrow — to-morrow — I will show them what an invalid is!"

"Alas!" replied Petit-Pierre, sadly, "to-morrow doesn't belong to us, my poor marquis, and you do wrong to rely upon it."

"How so?"

"You have heard that the movement has not spread and become general to such an extent as we hoped. Who knows whether the firing we are hearing now is not the last which will salute our flag?"

"Damnation!" growled the marquis, like an angry bull-dog, snapping at his chain.

At this moment a signal from the orchard interrupted their conversation. They both rushed to the door and saw Bertha, whom the marquis had sent out on a tour of discovery, leading a wounded peasant, whom she had great difficulty in holding upright. Mary and Rosine had already run out to help her.

He was a youngster of some twenty to twenty-two years, with a bullet in his shoulder.

Petit-Pierre ran to meet him, and made him sit down in a chair, where he fainted.

"For pity's sake, go away!" said the marquis to Petit-Pierre; "my daughters and I will look after the poor devil."

"Why should I go away?"

"Because everybody can't bear the sight of a wound; because, in short, I fear that you will find it beyond your strength."

"So you're like the rest of them, and make me think that our friends were right in their judgment upon us both."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you seem to agree with the others in supposing that I lack pluck."

As Mary and Bertha were preparing to dress the wound, she said to them, —

"Don't you touch the brave boy; I, and I alone, will dress his wound, do you hear?"

With the scissors she cut the sufferer's sleeve down the

whole length (it was stuck to the arm by the dried blood), lay bare the wound, washed it, covered it with lint, and bandaged it neatly.

As she finished, the wounded man opened his eyes, and recovered his senses.

"What's the news?" asked the marquis, unable longer to restrain his impatience.

"Alas," was the reply, "our boys, victorious for a moment, were beaten back!"

Petit-Pierre, who had not once changed color during her work on the wound, became as pale as the linen bandages she had been using.

She was just putting in the last pin.

Seizing the marquis by the arm, she drew him to the door.

"Marquis," said she, "you who saw the Blues in the great war must be able to answer this question: What does one do when Fatherland is in danger?"

"Everybody runs to arms, of course," replied the marquis.

"Even the women?"

"Even the women, — yes, and the old men and children."

"Marquis, to-day the white flag is in danger of falling, perhaps never to rise again. Will you condemn me to form none but barren and powerless wishes for its triumph?"

"But just consider," cried the marquis. "Suppose you should be struck by a bullet—"

"Suppose I should! Do you think that my son's cause would be injured because they had my bloody, ball-pierced clothes to carry on a pike at the head of our battalions?"

"Oh, no!" cried the marquis, electrified by her

words. "I would, indeed, curse my old native province if the very stones did not rise at such a sight!"

"Come with me, then. Come and join those who are fighting!"

"But I solemnly promised that you should not leave the Jacquet mill," replied the marquis, less resolutely than he had combated Petit-Pierre's former entreaties, and as if the suggestion that he had been dealt with as an invalid had shaken his firmness in the execution of his orders.

"Very well, I release you from your promise!" cried Petit-Pierre; "and knowing your gallantry, I command you to accompany me. Come, then, marquis, and if there is still time, we will entice victory back to our ranks; if it is too late, we can at least die with our friends!"

With these words, Petit-Pierre darted across the yard and through the orchard, followed by Bertha and the marquis, who felt obliged to renew his supplications now and then for form's sake, but who was, at heart, delighted beyond expression at the turn affairs had taken.

Mary and Rosine remained behind to attend to the wounded man.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE-FIELD.

THE Jacquet mill was about a league from the village of Chêne. Petit-Pierre, guided by the sound of the firing, ran half of the distance; and the marquis had the greatest difficulty in stopping her, when they drew near the scene of the fighting, and in persuading her to show some little prudence, and not plunge in among the soldiers with her head down.

By going around one end of the line of *tirailleurs*, whose firing had guided them, Petit-Pierre and his companions found themselves among the rear-guard of the little Vendean army, which had lost all the ground it had gained in the morning and had been forced back by the soldiers well outside the village. When Petit-Pierre, with hair flying, and gasping for breath, climbed the little hill where most of the Vendéans were, they welcomed her with enthusiastic shouts.

Gaspard, surrounded by his officers, was firing a musket, like a common soldier. He turned around at the shouting, and spied Petit-Pierre, Bertha, and the Marquis de Souday, — the last-named of whom had lost his hat, in his excitement, and was tearing along, with his hair flying in all directions.

It was to him that Gaspard addressed himself.

"Is it thus that M. le Marquis de Souday keeps his promises?" he asked, in the tone of an irritated commander.

"Monsieur," retorted the marquis, with some bitterness, "you ought not to expect the impossible from a poor *invalid* like myself."

Petit-Pierre quickly intervened. Her party was not so strong that she could afford to allow its leaders to quarrel among themselves.

"Souday, like yourself, is in duty bound to obey me, my friend," said she. "I rarely assume to enforce my right to obedience, but to-day I thought I ought to do so. Therefore I now resume my title of general-in-chief, and I say to you, 'In what condition are our affairs, my lieutenant?'"

Gaspard shook his head, with sad expressiveness.

"The Blues are in force," he replied, "and every moment some messenger comes to tell me of additional reinforcements."

"So much the better!" cried Petit-Pierre. "There will be more of them to tell France how we died!"

"You surely don't think of taking part in the fight, madame!"

"Look you, I am not 'Madame' here; I am a soldier. So go ahead, and don't worry about me. Throw forward your lines of sharpshooters, and renew your firing."

"Very well; but, first, fall back!"

"Fall back! Who?"

"You, in God's name!"

"Nonsense! 'Forward!' you meant to say."

Snatching Gaspard's sword from his hand, Petit-Pierre put her hat on the point of it, and darted off toward the village, shouting, —

"All who love me, follow me!"

Gaspard tried in vain to detain her by seizing her in his arms. Swift of foot and of movement, she eluded

his grasp and kept on toward the houses, whence the soldiers, observing the movement among the Vendéans, opened a murderous fire.

When they saw Petit-Pierre's dangerous plight, all the Vendéans rushed forward to make a rampart with their bodies. Their impetuous rush was so irresistible that in a very few seconds they had crossed the little stream a second time and reached the middle of the village, at close quarters with the Blues.

In an instant a horrible hand-to-hand fight was raging.

Gaspard, intent upon one single object, — the welfare of Petit-Pierre, — succeeded in coming up with her, seizing her, and placing her in the midst of his own men. While he thus forgot his own safety to protect the august life which he believed to have been intrusted to him by God himself, a soldier, stationed at the corner of one of the first houses, drew a bead on him.

It would have been all up with the Chouan leader but for the prompt action of the marquis, who saw the danger that threatened him, crept up behind the trooper, and knocked up the barrel of the gun just as he pulled the trigger.

The bullet flew wide of its mark and struck a chimney.

The soldier turned upon the marquis, in a rage, and tried to deal him a thrust with his bayonet, which he avoided by drawing back. The old gentleman was about to retort with a pistol-shot, when a bullet shattered the weapon in his hand.

"All the better!" shouted the marquis, drawing his sword and making such a terrific lunge at his opponent that he rolled over at his feet like an ox struck with the axe. "I prefer side-arms!"

"Well, General Gaspard," he cried, "what do you say now to the invalid?"

Bertha, meanwhile, had followed Petit-Pierre, her father, and the Vendéans. But she was much less interested in the soldiers than in what was going on about her.

She was looking for Michel. She sought to distinguish him among those whom the eddying crowd of men and horses brought within her line of vision.

The soldiers, surprised by the suddenness and energy of the attack, fell back step by step. The national guard of Vieille-Vigne retreated; the ground was strewn with corpses.

The result was that as the Blues ceased to reply to the fire of the peasants posted in the vineyards and gardens, Master Jacques, who commanded the sharpshooters, was enabled to form them in a body. And placing himself at their head, he led them through a lane which ran behind the gardens, and fell upon the soldiers in the rear.

The latter, whose resistance had become more stubborn within a few moments, sustained this attack gallantly; and forming a hollow square in the main street, held their new assailants in check.

Soon there was a slight wavering among the Vendéans. The Blues regained the advantage; and their column having charged past the little lane by which Master Jacques and his Rabbits had debouched, he and five or six of his followers, among whom Courte-Joie and Trigaud the Vermin were conspicuous, became separated from the bulk of their band.

Master Jacques rallied the handful of Chouans who remained with him, and placing their backs against a wall, to avoid a flank movement, and sheltered by the scaffolding of an unfinished house at the corner of the lane, they prepared to sell their lives dearly.

Courte-Joie, armed with a small, double-barrelled gun, kept up an incessant fire on the soldiers; and every one of his bullets made one man bite the dust. As for Trigaud, whose hands were free, — the cripple being securely bound to his shoulders by a thong, — he handled, with marvellous skill, a long-handled scythe, which he used as a lance or an enormous sword, at will.

Just as the beggar, with a back-handed stroke, had laid low a gendarme whom Courte-Joie had only winged, loud shouts of triumph were heard among the troops, and Master Jacques and his men spied a woman, dressed in man's clothing, whom the Blues had taken prisoner, with manifestations of the most unbounded delight.

It was Bertha, who, in her absorbing desire to find Michel, had imprudently gone too near the enemy's lines.

The soldiers, misled by her attire, which disclosed the sex of its wearer, believed they had taken Madame la Duchesse de Berry.

Hence their joyous shouts.

Master Jacques was equally deceived.

Eager then to atone for the error he had committed some days before in the forest of Touvois, he gave a signal to his followers, who thereupon abandoned their defensive attitude, rushed forward, and — thanks to the broad swath cut for them by the beggar's terrible scythe — made their way to the prisoner, rescued her, and placed her in their midst.

The disappointed soldiers formed anew for a mighty effort, and rushed upon Master Jacques, who had at once resumed his position against the house; and the little squad became the centre of a bristling circle of twenty-five bayonets and of an incessant sheet of flame.

Two Vendéans had already fallen dead. Master Jacques, his wrist shattered by a bullet, was forced to throw away his gun, and was reduced to his sword, which he wielded with his left hand. Courte-Joie's stock of cartridges was exhausted. Trigaud's scythe was almost the sole protection of the four surviving Vendéans; but thus far it had been all-sufficient, for it mowed down the soldiers so unerringly that they no longer dared to approach the terrible beggar.

But Trigaud, in aiming a blow with the point of the scythe at a horseman, made an awkward thrust; the weapon came in contact with a stone, and was shivered into small pieces. So great was the force of the blow that the giant fell on his knees; the thong with which Courte-Joie was secured broke, and the cripple rolled upon the ground.

A tremendous shout of joy welcomed this accident, which delivered the redoubtable beggar into the hands of his enemies. One of the National Guard already had his bayonet raised to transfix the cripple, when Bertha, drawing a pistol from her belt, fired at him, and brought him down so in the nick of time that he fell upon Courte-Joie's body.

Trigaud picked himself up, with an agility which was hardly to be expected from such a mountain of flesh. His separation from Courte-Joie, and the dangerous situation of the latter, increased his strength tenfold. With the handle of his scythe he struck down one soldier and broke the ribs of another. With a vigorous kick he sent the body of the National Guardsman, who had fallen upon his friend, ten feet away; and taking Courte-Joie in his arms, as a nurse does a baby, he joined Bertha and Master Jacques under the scaffolding.

While Courte-Joie was lying on the ground, his eyes,

glancing about with the rapidity and keenness of a man in danger of death, to see whence he can look for deliverance, fell upon the scaffolding and upon certain piles of stone which the masons had placed thereon, to be used in building the wall.

"Draw back into the recess of the doorway," he said to Bertha, as soon as he found himself by her side, — thanks to Trigaud; "perhaps I may be able to return the service I just received at your hands. Do you, Trigaud, let the Red Breeches come as close as possible."

Despite the obtuseness of his mind, Trigaud evidently realized what his companion expected of him; for little as it harmonized with the gravity of the situation, he emitted a roar of laughter, like the blare of a trumpet.

Meanwhile the soldiers, seeing that the three men were disarmed, and desirous at any cost of regaining possession of the Amazon, whom they still mistook for Madame, drew near, calling upon them to surrender.

But just as they got under the scaffolding, Trigaud, having placed Courte-Joie by Bertha's side, ran to one of the wooden uprights which held up the whole structure, seized it with both hands, shook it, and tore it out of the ground.

The boards at once tilted downward. The piles of stone slid down the incline and fell like hail upon the beggar, striking down ten soldiers around him.

Meanwhile the Nantais, led by Gaspard and the Marquis de Souday, with a desperate effort — by dint of hacking with their swords, thrusting with the bayonet, and firing at close range — had succeeded in forcing back the Blues, who retreated slowly and re-formed in order of battle in the open fields, where their great

superiority in numbers and equipment made their ultimate victory inevitable.

The Vendéans, however rash the venture, were on the point of risking an attack, when Master Jacques, who had been joined by his men and who had not left the field, despite his wound, whispered a few words in Gaspard's ear.

Thereupon, deaf to the commands and entreaties of Petit-Pierre, the commander at once ordered a retrograde movement, and resumed the position he had occupied an hour earlier at the other end of the village.

Petit-Pierre tore her hair in her anger, and urgently demanded explanations, which Gaspard declined to give her until he had ordered a halt.

"We have now five or six thousand men all about us," said he, "while we are scarcely six hundred. The honor of the flag is safe. That is all that we can hope for."

"Are you sure of that?" Petit-Pierre asked.

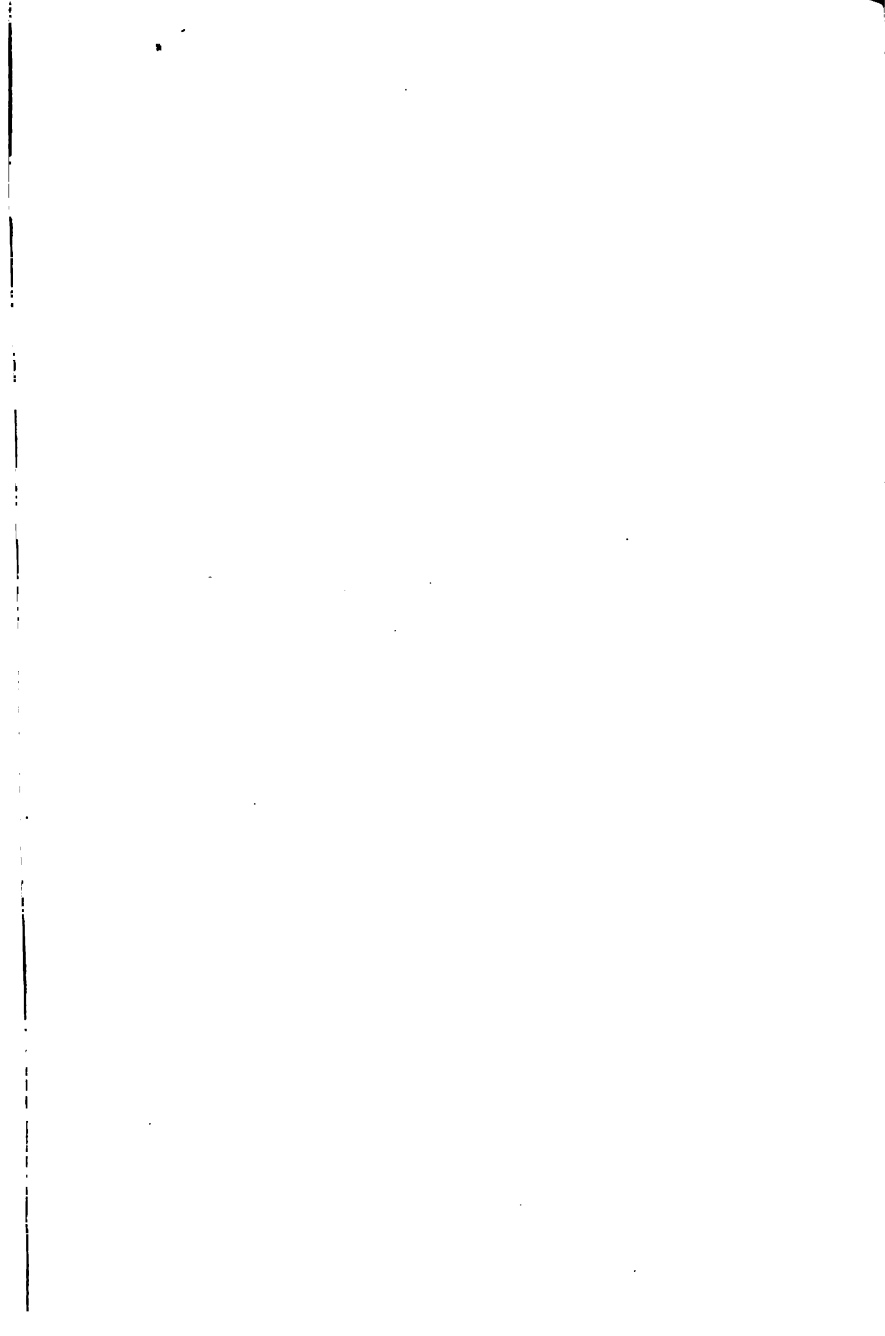
"Look for yourself," replied Gaspard, leading her to a slightly elevated position.

He pointed out to her in every direction, and all converging upon the village of Chêne, dark masses, fringed with bayonets, glistening in the rays of the setting sun. Lastly, he called her attention to the blaring of bugles and beating of drums, which came from every point of the compass.

"You see," said he, "in less than an hour we shall be surrounded; and there will be no other resource for all these worthy fellows who are with us but to seek death in battle, if, like myself, they have no taste for Louis Philippe's dungeons."

Petit-Pierre stood for some moments, gloomy and silent. Then, convinced of the truth of the Vendéan's

words, and seeing all her hopes vanish, strong and deeply rooted as they had been only a few moments before, her courage fled, she became once more what she really was, — a woman. And she who had defied sword and fire with heroic intrepidity, sat herself down on a stone and wept bitterly, scorning to hide the tears which chased one another down her cheeks.



DUCHESS DE BERRY.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL, II. 128.







CHAPTER XII.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

MEANWHILE Gaspard, having returned to his companions, thanked them for their services, and urged them, postponing further efforts to a more favorable occasion, to scatter so that they might the more easily elude the pursuit of the soldiers. Then he returned to Petit-Pierre, whom he found on the same spot, surrounded by the Marquis de Souday, Bertha, and a few Vendéans who neglected to think about their own safety until they had made sure of hers.

"Well, have they gone?" she inquired, as Gaspard came back to her alone.

"Yes; what would you have them do more than they have done?"

"Poor fellows!" continued Petit-Pierre; "how much suffering awaits them! Why did God deny me the consolation of pressing them to my heart? But I had not the courage, and they are right to leave me thus. To suffer the pangs of death twice in one's life would be too much, and I hoped never to live the days of Cherboung over again."

"Now," said Gaspard, "we must think about putting you in a place of safety."

"Oh, don't trouble about my poor person," replied Petit-Pierre; "my only regret is that a bullet did not choose to put an end to me to-day. My death would not have given you the victory, of course, but the struggle

would at least have been glorious, while now, what is left for us to do?"

"Wait for better days. You have proved to the French people that a valiant heart beats in your bosom; courage is the principal virtue which they demand in their rulers, and they will remember, never fear."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre. She rose, and took Gaspard's arm, and together they descended the little hill and started across country.

The troops, on the contrary, being unfamiliar with the country, were obliged to follow the travelled roads.

Gaspard led the little procession through paths where they were in no danger of meeting any but scouts; and thanks to Master Jacques' knowledge of some almost impracticable by-ways, they reached the neighborhood of the Jacquet mill without meeting a single tricolored cockade.

On the way Bertha asked her father if he had seen Michel anywhere during the *mêlée*; but the old gentleman, who was left in very bad humor by the result of the insurrection, which had been raised with so much difficulty and so soon blotted out, replied very harshly that no one knew what had become of young De la Logerie since two days before; that it was very probable that he had lost his courage, and had disgracefully thrown over his opportunity of acquiring renown, and the alliance which depended on it.

This reply alarmed Bertha.

We need not say, however, that she did not believe a single word of what the marquis suggested.

But her heart trembled at the only solution which did seem probable to her, — that Michel had been slain or seriously wounded. She determined, therefore, to push her investigations until she knew the truth as to the fate of her beloved.

She questioned all the Vendéans.

Not one of them had seen Michel; and some, under the spur of their old-time hatred for the father, expressed themselves concerning the son in terms no less energetic than those which the marquis had employed.

Bertha became almost mad with grief. Nothing, save palpable, visible, indisputable proof, could have made her confess that she had chosen one unworthy of her; and when appearances seemed to be altogether against Michel, her love, more ardent and impetuous than ever in face of these accusations, gave her the strength to treat them as calumnies.

A few moments before, her heart was torn, her brain whirled at the thought that Michel might have met his death in the battle; while now, behold the thought of that glorious death had become her hope, her consolation. She was in great haste to make sure that he had fallen. She thought of returning to Chêne, and searching the battle-field for the young man's body, as Edith sought for Harold's; and when she had cleared his memory from her father's hateful insinuations, she would avenge him, Michel, upon his murderers.

She was considering how she might manage to have an excuse for remaining behind and returning to Chêne, when Aubin Courte-Joie and Trigaud, who formed the rear guard of the little troop, overtook the others, and passed close to her side.

She breathed again; no doubt she should learn something from them.

"How is it with you, my good friends?" said she. "Can you tell me anything about M. de la Logerie?"

"Oh, yes, my dear young lady," replied Courte-Joie.

"At last!" cried Bertha; and with all the eagerness of hope renewed, she asked, —

"It is n't true, is it, as they charge, that he left the division?"

"He did leave it," was the reply.

"When?"

"The night before the battle of Maisdan."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" groaned Bertha; "are you sure of it?"

"Perfectly sure. I saw him join Jean Oullier at La Croix Philippe; indeed, we went a little way along the Clisson road with them."

"With Jean Oullier?" cried Bertha. "Oh, then I have no fear. Jean Oullier would never run away; and if Michel is with him he has done nothing cowardly or dishonorable."

Suddenly a terrible thought assailed her mind.

Why Jean Oullier's sudden interest in the young man? How did he happen to go with Jean rather than with the marquis?

These two questions, which the maiden propounded to herself, filled her heart with gloomy ideas.

"You say," she asked Courte-Joie, "that you saw them both going toward Clisson?"

"With my own eyes."

"What happened in that direction? Do you know?"

"It's too far away for us to have heard the details yet," replied the inn-keeper. "However, a *gars* from Sainte Lumine just now came up with us, and told us that since ten o'clock this morning they have been hearing very heavy firing toward La Sèvre."

Bertha made no comment; but her ideas changed completely, and she saw in her imagination Michel led into certain death by Jean Oullier's hatred for him. She fancied the poor child lying wounded, gasping for breath, helpless and abandoned in the midst of some desert and

blood-soaked moor. She seemed to hear him calling to her for help.

"Do you know any one who can take me where Jean Oullier is?" she asked Courte-Joie.

"To-day?"

"This moment."

"Why, the roads are crowded with Red Breeches!"

"We can take the paths."

"But night is almost here."

"Our road will be all the safer. Find me a guide, or I shall go alone."

The two men looked at one another.

"You shall have no guide but myself," said Courte-Joie. "Am I not indebted to your family? Besides, Mademoiselle Bertha, no longer ago than this very day, you did me a service which I have not forgotten in the matter of a certain National Guard, who was on the point of spitting me with his bayonet."

"Oh, never mind that! Just hold back, and wait for me here in this wheat-field; in a quarter of an hour I will be with you."

Courte-Joie and Trigaud crouched among the grain, and Bertha, quickening her pace, overtook Petit-Pierre and the Vendéans just as they reached the Jacquet mill.

She hastened up to the little room which she and her sister shared, and hurriedly changed her blood-stained clothes for a peasant woman's costume. Going down again, she found Mary devoting herself to the wounded, and, without disclosing her plan, told her not to be alarmed if she did not appear again till the next day.

Then she turned back on the road she had just traversed.

Notwithstanding Bertha's reticence with Mary, the

latter read on her sister's agitated features all that was passing in her heart; she knew of Michel's disappearance, and had no doubt that Bertha's sudden departure was connected therewith. But after the occurrence of the day before, she did not dare to question her.

The only consequence was that an additional cause of agony was added to those with which her heart was already torn; and when they summoned her to attend upon Petit-Pierre, who was about to set out in search of another place of shelter, she knelt and prayed to God that her sacrifice might not be wasted, and that he would be pleased to preserve the life and the honor of Bertha's betrothed.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHÂTEAU OF LA PÉNISSIÈRE.

WHILE the Vendéans were fighting their useless but not inglorious battle at Chêne, forty-two of their fellows were engaged in a struggle which will be recorded in history, at La PéniSSIÈRE de la Cour.

These forty-two Royalists, forming part of the Clisson division, had left that town with the intention of marching upon the village of Cugan, and disarming the National Guard there. A frightful tempest, bursting over their heads, compelled them to seek shelter in the château of La PéniSSIÈRE, where a battalion of the Twenty-ninth regiment of the Line, informed of their presence there, speedily laid siege to them.

La PéniSSIÈRE was an ancient structure with a single story between the ground-floor and the attic; there were fifteen openings of irregular shape in the wall. The chapel was built on to a corner of the château. Beyond that, extending to the valley, was a meadow cut up by quickset hedges, and which the recent heavy rains had transformed into a lake.

There was also a wall around the dwelling, fortified by the Vendéans.

The *chef-de-bataillon* in command of the troops of the Line, ordered an assault as soon as he had reconnoitred the position.

After a short defence the outer wall was abandoned, and the Vendéans withdrew inside the château and barricaded the doors.

Then they took up positions on the ground-floor and the floor above, each detachment having a bugle which played incessantly through the whole fight; and they began by a very well directed fire from the windows, — a fire so rapid and well sustained as to leave no possibility of a suspicion of their small number.

The most skilful sharpshooters were detailed to keep up the firing; with scarcely a break, they kept discharging heavy blunderbusses, which their comrades rapidly re-loaded and passed back to them.

Each blunderbuss carried a dozen balls; and the Vendéans fired five or six of them at once, so that they produced all the effect of a battery of cannon charged with canister.

Twice the soldiers returned to the assault; they got within twenty feet of the château, but were compelled to fall back.

The commander ordered a fresh attack; and while it was preparing, four men with a mason advanced toward the château, selecting a side which had no window looking upon the garden, so that the approach to it could not be defended. When they reached the foot of the wall the soldiers placed a ladder against it, mounted to the roof, which they partly tore up, threw some lighted brands into the attic, and departed. In an instant a mass of smoke poured up through the roof, through which flames could be seen.

The soldiers shouted at the tops of their voices, and marched again upon the little citadel, which seemed to have hoisted a standard of fire. The besieged had discovered the blaze, but they had no time to extinguish it; and then, too, fire always tends to ascend, and they hoped that when the roof should be destroyed it would go out of itself. They replied to the cries of the soldiers

with a terrible volley, during which the two bugles never for an instant ceased their warlike and lively airs.

The Whites could hear their foes say, "These are not men we're contending with, they're devils!" and this tribute to their prowess inspired them with renewed ardor.

Meanwhile the besiegers had received a reinforcement of some fifty men; the commander ordered the charge to be beaten again, and the soldiers rushed headlong toward the château once more, running over one another in their rivalry.

This time they reached the doors, which the sappers at once set about blowing up. The order was given to those of the Vendéans who were on the ground-floor to ascend to the floor above; they obeyed, and while half of the besieged kept up the fusillade, the other half tore up the floor and removed the boards; so that the moment the soldiers entered, they were greeted with a volley at close quarters, the muskets being pointed through the spaces between the floor timbers. For the fourth time they were obliged to withdraw.

The commander then ordered the ground-floor to be treated as the attic had been.

Bunches of grass and of dry wood were thrown in through the windows, some lighted torches were thrown in on top of them, and in ten minutes the Vendéans had a sheet of flame over their heads and under their feet.

And yet they fought on! The clouds of smoke which poured from every window were lighted up from second to second by the discharge of the blunderbusses; but the firing seemed to be rather the vengeance of desperate men than an attempt to defend themselves. It seemed impossible for the little garrison to escape death.

The place had ceased to be tenable: the joists and timbers had taken fire, and were crackling under their feet; tongues of flame began to come up through the floor; any moment the roof might fall in upon the heads of the besieged, or the floor sink beneath them; the smoke was stifling.

The leaders resolved on a desperate course, — to make a sortie; but as it was essential that it should be covered by a continuous fusillade to occupy the attention of the soldiers, in order to have any chance of success, they asked who would consent to sacrifice themselves for their comrades.

Eight men volunteered.

The troop thereupon divided into two squads. Thirty-three men with a bugler were to try to reach one end of the park, which was enclosed by a hedge simply; the eight others, including the second bugle, were to cover the sally.

Following out these arrangements, while those who were to remain ran from window to window, keeping up a well sustained firing, the others made a hole in the wall on the opposite side to that where the soldiers were, and passed out in good order, bugler at the head, marching toward the end of the garden where the hedge was.

The soldiers fired upon them and dashed after them. The Vendéans returned their fire, overturned all who undertook to intercept them, and while the greater number of them passed through the hedge, five were killed; the others scattered in every direction over the flooded meadow. The bugler, who marched first, received three bullets in his body, but never ceased to play.

Meanwhile, the men left in the château still held out. Every time that the soldiers tried to approach a storm

of bullets issued from the furnace, and mowed down their ranks.

Matters remained in this condition for half an hour. The notes of the bugle which had been left with the besieged resounded without cessation amid the uproar of the musketry, the sullen roaring and sharp hissing of the flames, as if these men were hurling defiance at death.

At last there was a terrible crash; showers of sparks rose into the air; the bugle was mute, and the firing ceased.

The floor had fallen, and the little garrison was doubtless buried in the ruins; for nothing less than a miracle could have preserved them from being swallowed up in the roaring furnace.

Such was the opinion of the soldiers, who, after they had gazed intently at the smoking mass for some moments, without hearing a shriek or a groan to indicate the escape of any Vendean from a horrible death, marched away from this funeral pyre of friends and foes alike; so that there soon remained on the field of battle, but now so animated and clamorous, nought but the smoking ruins, and about them a few dead bodies lighted up by the expiring rays of the conflagration.

Such was the condition of affairs during a great part of the night; but about one o'clock in the morning, a man above middle height came gliding along the hedges, crawling when there was a path to be crossed, and set about examining the ruins of the château.

As he saw nothing to arouse suspicion, he made the circuit of the burned building, and inspected carefully each body that he passed; then he disappeared in the darkness. In a short time he returned with another man on his back, accompanied by a woman dressed as a peasant.

This party our readers of course have recognized as consisting of Bertha, Courte-Joie, and Trigaud.

Bertha was pale as death, and her customary firmness and decision of manner had given place to a sort of bewilderment. From time to time she outstripped her companions, and Courte-Joie had to urge her to be more prudent.

When they came out upon the open meadow where the soldiers had been stationed, and had before them the fifteen openings which stood out fiery and gaping from the blackened front of the building, and seemed like so many entrances to hell, the maiden felt her strength give way. She fell on her knees, and cried out a name, which in her agony became a mere sob; then she rose again like a man, and ran toward the smouldering ruins.

On her way she stumbled against some object: it was a dead body, and with the most intense anguish she stooped over the livid face, and raised the head by the hair; then she spied the other bodies scattered about, and began running madly from one to another.

"Alas! mademoiselle," said Courte-Joie, following her about, "he's not here! To spare you this mournful spectacle I ordered Trigaud to come on ahead and examine the bodies. He has only seen M. de la Logerie once or twice, but idiot as he is, rest assured that my poor companion would have known him if he had been among them."

"Yes, yes, you are right, and if he is anywhere —" exclaimed Bertha, pointing to La Pénissière. And before the two men even thought of holding her back, she jumped upon the sill of one of the windows of the ground-floor, and stood upon the shaking stone, gazing down into the fiery gulf which still roared sullenly at her feet, and into which she seemed tempted to hurl herself.

At a sign from Courte-Joie, Trigaud took her in his arms, and put her down upon the ground. Bertha made no resistance; her will seemed to be paralyzed by a thought which had just occurred to her.

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" she cried, as if with the last effort of her waning strength, "thou didst not permit me to be at hand to defend him, or to die with him, and now thou deniest me even the poor solace of giving his body Christian burial!"

"Come, mademoiselle," said Courte-Joie; "if it's God's will, we must bow before it."

"Oh, never! never!" shrieked Bertha, in the frenzy of despair.

"Alas!" rejoined the cripple, "my heart, too, is very heavy; for if M. de la Logerie is there, poor Jean Oullier must be there too, you see."

Bertha groaned; in the selfishness of her grief she had not thought of Jean Oullier.

"To be sure," added Courte-Joie, "he has died as he wished to die, with his arms in his hand; but that does n't reconcile me to the thought of his being in that fiery pit."

"Is there no hope, then?" cried Bertha. "May they not have escaped in some way or other? Oh, let us try to think of something!"

Courte-Joie shook his head.

"It seems to me hardly possible," said he. "According to what one of the thirty-three who made the sortie told us, five of them were killed."

"But Jean Oullier and M. Michel were among those who stayed behind," said Bertha.

"Undoubtedly, and that's why I have so little hope. Look!" said Courte-Joie, pointing to the walls which rose without a break from the ground to the roof, and

then calling Bertha's attention to the ground-floor,— a roaring furnace wherein the floors of the upper story and the attic, and the ruins of the roof were blazing,— “look! there is nothing left but burning ruins, and walls which threaten to fall. You must be brave, mademoiselle, but it's a thousand to one that your betrothed and Jean Oullier have been crushed beneath the *débris*.”

“No, no!” cried Bertha, leaping to her feet; “no, he cannot, must not be dead! If it needed a miracle to save him, God has performed the miracle! I mean to search the ruins; I mean to examine the walls. I must have him, living or dead! I will have him, Courte-Joie, do you understand?”

As she spoke, she grasped in her white hands a beam whose charred end protruded from a window, and made superhuman struggles to pull it toward her, as if with it she could raise the enormous mass of material, and discover what was hidden under it.

“You must not think of it!” cried Courte-Joie, hopelessly; “the task is beyond your strength, or mine, or even Trigaud's! Besides, you could not finish it; the soldiers will certainly return in the morning, and they must not find us here. Let us go, mademoiselle! in God's name let us go!”

“Go, if you choose,” replied Bertha, in a tone which forbade remonstrance; “but I remain.”

“You remain?” cried Courte-Joie, in utter amazement.

“I remain! If the soldiers return, it will be for the purpose of examining the ruins, no doubt; I will throw myself at their commander's feet; my tears and my prayers will prevail upon him to let me assist his men in their task, and I shall find him!—oh, I shall find him!”

“You deceive yourself, mademoiselle; the Red Breeches

will recognize you as the Marquis de Souday's daughter, and if they don't shoot you, they will make you their prisoner. So come! in a very few moments the day will break; come! and if need be," added Courte-Joie, alarmed by the excited state of the girl, — "if need be, I promise to bring you back again to-night."

"No, once more I say no! I will not leave this spot!" she replied. "A voice here" (she struck her hand against her heart) "tells me that he is calling me — that he needs me.

"Take another step," she cried, mounting to the window-sill again, as she saw Trigaud, at a signal from Courte-Joie, come forward to seize her, — "take another step, and I jump into this furnace!"

Courte-Joie, realizing that nothing was to be obtained from her by violent measures, was about to resort to entreaties, when Trigaud, who was standing with arms outstretched in the position he had assumed to take hold of Bertha, motioned to his companion to keep silent. The cripple, knowing by experience the tremendously acute senses of the idiot, obeyed.

Trigaud listened intently.

"Are the soldiers coming back?" Courte-Joie inquired.

"It's not that," said Trigaud.

He unbound Aubin, who was as usual strapped upon his shoulders, threw himself flat upon his stomach and glued his ear to the ground.

Bertha, without leaving the spot where she had established herself, turned toward the beggar.

His actions, and the words he uttered, made her heart beat fast, she knew not why, and held her in a state of breathless suspense.

"Do you hear anything out of the ordinary?" demanded Courte-Joie.

"Yes," was the reply, accompanied by a sign to Bertha and Courte-Joie that they should listen as he was doing.

Trigaud, as we know, was very sparing of his words.

Courte-Joie put his ear to the ground, and Bertha jumped down from her window and did the same; but she kept it there but a second, ere she jumped up again, and cried, excitedly,—

"They are alive! they are alive! Oh, my God, how I thank thee!"

"Don't be in too much of a hurry to hope," said Aubin. "To tell the truth, I can hear a dull noise which seems to come from the ruins. But there were eight of them; who can say that the noise comes from the lips of the two we seek?"

"Who can say, Aubin? My presentiments, which forbade my yielding to your entreaties and leaving the place as you wanted me to do. They are our friends, I tell you! They have sought and found shelter in some hole, and now they are imprisoned by the fall of all this stuff."

"It's possible," muttered Courte-Joie.

"Oh, it's certain!" said Bertha; "but how are we to help them? How reach the place where they are?"

"If they are in an underground passage, it must have an outlet; if they are in a cellar, it must have an air-hole. We must find these; and if we fail, we will dig up the earth until we get to them."

As he finished, Bertha began to rush around the house, pulling up and throwing aside in mad haste the timbers, joists, stones, and tiles which had fallen along the outer wall, and hid the foundation.

Suddenly she uttered a cry.

Trigaud and Courte-Joie hastened to where she stood,

one on his great legs, and the other crawling on his stumps and his hands as swiftly as any batrachian.

"Listen!" said Bertha, triumphantly.

From the spot at which she had stopped, a dull, but continuous noise, could be distinctly heard, issuing apparently from the depths of the ruined building,—a noise like that of some instrument striking measured blows against the foundation.

"It's over there," said Bertha, pointing to a mass of material strewn along the wall; "there's where we must look."

Trigaud set to work. He began by pushing away an enormous piece of the roof which had fallen upright against the wall; then he threw aside a mass of masonry heaped up at that point by the fall of the whole upper portion of a window on the first floor; and finally, after prodigious feats of strength, he made an opening through which the noise made by the poor, buried wretches at their work came to them with much greater distinctness.

Bertha undertook to rush through the opening as soon as it was made; but Trigaud held her back. He took a lath and lighted it at the fire; then he tied the thong, which ordinarily kept Courte-Joie in place upon his shoulders, around the cripple's waist, and lowered him through the hole.

Trigaud and Bertha held their breath, in suspense.

They heard Courte-Joie speaking to the workers. Then he signalled to Trigaud to hoist him up.

Trigaud obeyed, with the promptness of a well-oiled machine.

"Living! They are living, are n't they?" asked Bertha, in a choking voice.

"Yes, mademoiselle," replied Courte-Joie; "but, for pity's sake, don't try to go in to them. They are not

in the cellar that this hole opens into, but in a sort of recess adjoining it. The opening through which they got there is closed up. We must absolutely go through the wall to get to them; and I am afraid that in doing that we may bring down part of the arch, which is very shaky now. Just let me put Trigaud to work."

Bertha fell on her knees and began to pray, while Courte-Joie laid in a stock of dry laths and went down into the hole again, followed by Trigaud.

After some ten minutes, which seemed like as many centuries to Bertha, there was a great crash of falling stone-work. A cry of agony escaped her. She rushed to the opening, and saw Trigaud coming up, carrying on his shoulder a body, bent over double, whose pallid face hung down upon the beggar's chest.

She recognized Michel.

"He is dead! *Mon Dieu*, he is dead!" she cried, afraid to approach.

"No, no," replied a voice, which she knew to be Jean Oullier's, from the bowels of the earth, — "no, he's not dead."

Thereupon the girl dashed forward, took Michel from Trigaud's hands, laid him upon the turf, and, reassured by the beating of his heart, tried to recall him to consciousness by moistening his forehead with water from the ruts in the road.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MOOR OF BOUAIMÉ.

WHILE Bertha was trying to arouse the baron from his swoon, caused in great measure by suffocation, Jean Oullier, in turn, emerged from the opening, followed by Courte-Joie, whom Trigaud pulled up by the same means he had used to lower him.

"Ah, *ça*! you were alone in there, were you?" Courte-Joie inquired.

"Yes."

"And the others?"

"They took shelter under the arch of the staircase, and the fall of the ceiling surprised them before they had time to join us."

"They are dead, then?"

"I don't think it; for about an hour after the soldiers went away, we heard them moving the stones about and talking. We shouted, but probably they didn't hear us."

"It's a lucky chance that we came!"

"Indeed it is! Without you, we should never have been able to get through the wall, especially considering the baron's condition. Ah, I made a fine campaign!" said Oullier, shaking his head as he glanced at Bertha, who, having taken Michel's head and shoulders upon her lap, had succeeded in bringing him to himself, and was pouring out upon him her delight at seeing him once more.

"To say nothing of its not being at an end yet," said Courte-Joie, misinterpreting the old Vendean's meaning, and gazing incessantly toward the east, where a broad purple streak announced that dawn would soon appear.

"What do you mean?" asked Jean.

"I mean that two hours more of darkness would have contributed greatly to our welfare. With a wounded man, a cripple, and a woman, it will not be easy to manage a retreat, — to say nothing of the way yesterday's victors will bluster around and beat up the woods to-day."

"True; but I feel at my ease, now that I have n't that iron arch over my head."

"You are only half saved, my poor Jean."

"Well, let's be on the lookout."

Jean Oullier thereupon rifled the cartridge-boxes of the dead men, took all the cartridges he could find, loaded his gun as unconcernedly as if he were just starting out to hunt, and then walked up to Bertha and Michel, whose eyes were closed as if he had fainted.

"Can you walk?" he asked.

Michel made no reply. Opening his eyes, he caught sight of Bertha, and closed them again, realizing the difficult position he was soon to occupy.

"Can you walk?" Bertha put the question this time, leaving him no room to doubt that he was the person interrogated.

"I think so," he replied.

Indeed he was suffering only from a flesh-wound in the arm, which had left the bone untouched. Bertha had examined it, and improvised a sling with the white silk cravat she wore around her neck.

"If you can't walk," said Jean, "I will carry you."

At this new demonstration of the great change which had taken place in the old Vendean's sentiments respecting young De la Logerie, Bertha walked up to him.

"Be good enough to explain to me," said she, "why you carried off my *fiancé*" (emphasizing the word),—"why you made him leave his post, and drew him into this affair, thus exposing him, notwithstanding all the perils he has incurred, to serious and shameful charges?"

"If M. de la Logerie's reputation has suffered any damage by my fault," said Jean Oullier, mildly, "I will repair it."

"You?" exclaimed Bertha, more and more astounded.

"Yes," said Jean; "for I will tell how full of pluck and resolution he has shown himself to be, for all his effeminate appearance."

"You will do that, Jean Oullier?" cried Bertha.

"I will not only do it," said the old man, "but if my testimony is not enough, I will procure more of the same kind from the brave fellows by whose side he fought; for I am determined now that his name shall be honorable and honored."

"What do I hear! Is it really you talking like that, Jean Oullier?"

Jean bent his head, in assent.

"You, who much preferred, so you said, to see me dead than bearing that name?"

"Yes; that's the way times change, Mademoiselle Bertha. To-day I am most anxious to see M. Michel my master's son-in-law."

Jean cast upon Bertha such an expressive glance, and his voice was so sad and tremulous, that she felt her heart sink, and involuntarily she thought of Mary.

She was about to question the old man; but at that moment the breeze wafted to their ears the sound of a flourish of trumpets, in the direction of Clisson.

"Courte-Joie was right!" cried Oullier. "The explanation you ask of me, Bertha, you shall have as soon as circumstances permit; but for the moment, let us think only of making good our escape."

"Forward!" he continued, after listening again. "There is not a moment to lose, I assure you."

Passing his arm through Michel's uninjured member, he gave the signal for departure.

Courte-Joie was already perched upon Trigaud's shoulders.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"We must get to the farm of Saint Hilaire," replied Jean Oullier, who felt that Michel walked unsteadily, from the very first step. "It is out of the question for our sick man to travel the eight leagues to Machecoul."

"Saint Hilaire farm it is," rejoined Courte-Joie, starting up his steed.

Although their progress was exceedingly slow, on account of the difficulty experienced by Michel in walking, the fugitives were within a few hundred yards of their destination when Trigaud proudly held up for his partner's inspection a sort of club, which he had been assiduously occupied in scraping and trimming as he walked along.

It was a wild apple-tree, of considerable size, which the beggar had noticed in the orchard of La Pénissière, and which had struck his fancy as being marvellously well adapted to take the place of the redoubtable scythe, broken in the fight at Chêne.

Courte-Joie shrieked with rage.

It was quite evident that he failed to share the

satisfaction with which his companion was handling the gnarled trunk of his new weapon.

"The devil fly away with the animal to the lowest depths of hell!" he cried.

"What in Heaven's name's the matter?" demanded Oullier, leaving Michel in Bertha's charge, and hurrying forward to overtake Trigaud and Courte-Joie.

"The matter is," exclaimed the latter, "that this sodden idiot will bring upon our heels the whole pack of Red Breeches! May the plague carry me off for not noticing him sooner! Since we left La Pénissière he has been playing 'Tom Thumb.' Unluckily, it's not soft bread he has been sowing along the road, but branches and leaves and bark from his infernal tree. So that if these soldier villains have noticed, as I fear, that we have been overhauling the ruins, they must be at the other end of the trail this beast has arranged for them. Oh, you double, triple, quadruple brute!" added Aubin, by way of peroration.

Suiting his actions to his words, he struck the beggar over the head with all the strength of his arm; but he seemed to mind the clout no more than if Courte-Joie had simply passed his hand through his hair.

"Damnation!" said Jean Oullier, thoughtfully. "What shall we do?"

"Give up all idea of the farm of Saint Hilaire, where they'll have us in a regular rat-trap."

"But it's impossible for M. de la Logerie to go any farther," said Bertha, quickly. "See how pale he is!"

"Let's strike off to the right," said Oullier. "We will hide among the rocks in Bouaimé moor. To leave fewer traces, and travel more rapidly, I will take M. Michel on my back. March in single file; Trigaud's foot-print will then obliterate the other two."

Bouaimé moor, for which Jean Oullier was heading, is situated about a league from Saint Hilaire village; it was necessary to cross the Maine to reach it. It is of considerable extent, and reaches as far north as Rémouillé and Montbert. Its surface is very irregular, and numerous granite bowlders lie about on all sides, some of which have evidently been moved at some time by human hands. They raise their brown, moss-covered heads among the tufts of heather and the yellow flowers of the furze and broom.

Jean Oullier led his little flock toward one of the most remarkable of these bowlders; it was flat, and rested upon four enormous blocks of granite. Ten or twelve persons might easily have lain in its shade.

Michel had no sooner reached the spot than he collapsed, and would have fallen flat, had not Bertha held him up. She hastily tore up handfuls of heather and spread it under the bowlder; and despite the seriousness of the situation, the youth was hardly laid upon this couch before he fell into a deep sleep.

Trigaud was stationed on top of the rock to do sentry-duty. An uncouth figure on an uncouth pedestal, his huge outlines recalled the giants who reared that altar two thousand years ago. Courte-Joie, unstrapped, lay beside Michel, over whom Bertha chose to keep watch; although the physical and mental fatigue of the preceding day and night had completely exhausted her. Jean Oullier stole away, partly to reconnoitre and partly to forage for provisions, of which the fugitives stood in sore need.

For nearly two hours Trigaud had been staring out over the vast expanse of heath which surrounded him; and although listening intently, he had heard nothing but the monotonous buzzing of the bees and wasps,

pilfering honey from the flowering broom and the wild thyme. The vapors which the sun caused to rise from the moist earth, were beginning to assume, in Trigaud's eyes, variegated hues, the dazzling effect of which, combined with the heat of the sun's rays which poured down upon his coarse mop of red hair, made his brain torpid. A thousand sleep-inducing elements were very near cajoling him into a nap, in which the digestion of any sort of food had no part, when the report of a fire-arm suddenly roused him from his lethargy.

He looked toward Saint Hilaire, and saw the little white cloud which follows a musket-shot.

Then he made out a man, running at the top of his speed and apparently making for the boulder.

With one leap, he descended from his pedestal.

Bertha, who had kept awake, heard the report, and had already aroused Courte-Joie.

Trigaud took the cripple in his arms, raised him above his head to a height of ten feet, and uttered these two words, which required no comment, —

“Jean Oullier.”

Courte-Joie shaded his eyes with his hand, and also recognized the old Vendean; but he observed that instead of running toward the point where they were awaiting him, Oullier had taken the hill opposite that on which the boulder lay, and was flying in the direction of Montbert.

He also noticed that instead of going along the side of the hill, and thus concealing himself from the sight of those who were pursuing him, he seemed to select the steepest places, so as to remain in full sight of everybody who might be beating up the country for a league around.

Jean Oullier was too clever to act thus without a

motive; and, in fact, he calculated that in this way he would draw the attention of the enemy upon himself alone, and lead them away from the scent they were probably following.

Courte-Joie therefore considered that the very best thing he and his companions could do was to stay where they were and await developments, meanwhile observing closely what took place.

The moment that intelligence was required rather than acute senses, Courte-Joie ceased to rely upon Trigaud. He had himself hoisted upon the boulder; but spare and lean as his diminutive form was, he did not think best to exhibit it upon that pedestal.

He lay flat on his stomach, his face turned toward the hill which Jean Oullier was ascending.

Soon, at the same spot where the latter first hove in sight, a soldier made his appearance, followed by another and another, until he had counted as many as twenty.

They seemed by no means eager to dispute the palm for swiftness of foot with the fugitive; but contented themselves with spreading out over the moor in such way as to cut off his retreat, in case he should try to retrace his steps. These equivocal tactics rendered Courte-Joie still more attentive; for they made him think that the soldiers he saw were not the only ones who were after the old Vendean.

The hill whose slope he was breasting came to an end about an eighth of a league from the spot where he then was, in a steep rock which overlooked a sort of swamp. Courte-Joie concentrated all his attention in that direction, doubtless because Jean Oullier's course would bring him out there.

"Ha!" said Trigaud, suddenly.

"What is it?" asked Courte-Joie.

"Red Breeches!" the beggar replied, pointing to a certain spot in the swamp.

Courte-Joie looked in the direction indicated by Trigaud's finger, and saw a gun-barrel gleaming among the reeds. Then he made out the form of a soldier, who was followed by a score or more of his fellows, as the one on the heath was.

Courte-Joie saw them crouch among the reeds and hide, like so many hunters on the watch. The game was Jean Oullier.

When he descended the cliff, he must inevitably fall into the ambush prepared for him.

Not a minute was to be lost in warning him.

Courte-Joie seized his gun and discharged it, taking care to hold the muzzle down close to the ground among the heather, and to fire behind the bowlder.

Then he looked out once more upon the scene of action.

Jean Oullier had heard the signal, and recognized the accent of Aubin's little gun; he was not in doubt for a moment as to the reasons which compelled his friends to lay aside the *incognito* he had taken so much pains to maintain. He made a sharp turn at right angles to his former course; and instead of keeping on toward the cliff and the swamp, he rapidly descended the hill. He no longer ran; he flew! Doubtless he had in mind some scheme which he was in haste to put in execution.

Meanwhile, at the rate at which he was travelling, he would have been with his friends again in a very few minutes. But notwithstanding Courte-Joie's precautions to hide the smoke from the view of the soldiers, they knew perfectly well from which direction the

report came; and those on the moor joined the others behind Jean Oullier, who was approaching with enormous strides. They were apparently taking counsel together, and awaiting orders.

Aubin scanned every inch of the horizon, raised a moistened finger, to see which way the wind was blowing, made sure that it came from the soldiers, and carefully felt of the heather, to assure himself that the sun, which was blazing hot, and the wind, which was quite brisk, had dried it sufficiently.

"Pray, what are you doing?" queried Bertha, who, having followed this prologue through its various phases, realized the imminence of their peril, and assisted Michel, whose suffering seemed to be of the mind more than of the body, to stand upright.

"What am I doing, or, rather, what am I going to do, my dear young lady?" replied the cripple. "I am going to make a Saint John's fire; and you can boast this evening, if, with its aid, you are safe (as I hope you will be), that you have seldom seen such another."

Thereupon he handed Trigaud several pieces of lighted tinder, which the giant laid in the midst of bunches of dry grass. These, under his mighty breath, soon were transformed into flaming masses, which he deposited at intervals of ten feet for a space of a hundred yards in the moor. He was putting his last bundle in place as Jean Oullier was rushing up the last slope of the hill on which the boulder stood.

"Up! up!" cried the latter; "I have not ten minutes' lead on them!"

"True; but here's something that will give us twenty!" said Aubin, pointing to the broom-stalks, which were beginning to crackle and twist in the

flame, while a score of little columns of smoke mounted toward the sky.

"The fire won't burn quickly enough, and may not be hot enough to stop them," said Jean.

"Besides," he added, after studying the state of the atmosphere a moment, "the wind will drive the flames in the direction we must take."

"Exactly; but it will drive the smoke in that direction, too, and that's what I'm counting on. The smoke will prevent their seeing how many there are of us, in the first place; and in the second place, which way we go."

"Oh, Courte-Joie! Courte-Joie!" muttered Oullier, "if you had had legs, what a poacher you would have made!"

Without a word more, he took Michel on his shoulders, despite the resistance of the young man, who insisted that he was strong enough to walk, and did not want to increase the Vendean's burden of fatigue. Then he followed Trigaud, who was already underway with his guide on his back.

"Take Mademoiselle's hand," said Courte-Joie to Oullier. "Let her draw in as long a breath as she can, and close her mouth. In ten minutes we sha'n't be able to see, and shall be just breathing."

The ten minutes allowed by Aubin had not expired before the little columns of smoke had united in one immense cloud three hundred yards in width, and the flames began to roar sullenly behind them.

"Can you see well enough to guide us?" said Jean to Courte-Joie. "The first and most important thing to be considered is to keep together."

"We have no other guide than the smoke; we will follow it blindly, and it will take us where we want to go. Only keep Trigaud in sight."

Jean Oullier was one of the men who know the full value of time and breath; so he said, simply, —

“Forward!” and himself set the example, apparently no more embarrassed by the weight of Michel than Trigaud by that of Courte-Joie.

They travelled thus for a quarter of an hour, without once getting clear of the smoke, which the fire, fanned by the wind into a furious conflagration, poured about them.

Every now and then Oullier would say to Bertha, who was more than half-suffocated, —

“Can you breathe?”

And she would reply with a scarcely audible “yes.”

The old keeper was not worried about Michel, for he was sure of his safety while he had him on his back.

Suddenly Trigaud, marching ahead, steered by Courte-Joie, without thought of their course, fell back a step.

He had put his foot into deep water, which the smoke had prevented his seeing, and had sunk in up to the knee.

Aubin shouted for joy.

“Here we are!” he cried. “The smoke has guided us as surely as the keenest-scented hunting-dog could do.”

“Aha!” said Jean.

“You understand, my boy, don’t you?” said Aubin, triumphantly.

“Yes, but how are we to get to the islet?”

“How? What’s the matter with Trigaud?”

“All right. But, isn’t it probable that the soldiers, failing to find us, will detect the ruse?”

“Of course, if they don’t find us; but they will find us.”

“What do you mean?”

“They have no idea how many of us there are; we

will put Mademoiselle and our patient in a safe place; then, as if we had gone astray, and been stopped by the pond, we will make a sally, you, Trigaud, and I, and will convince them with a few well-aimed bullets, that we are the same ones they saw a little while ago. Then, without further embarrassment or uneasiness, we will get under cover in Gineston woods, and from there we can easily come back to the island to-night."

"But how about food for them, poor children?"

"Pshaw! one doesn't die from going twenty-four hours without eating."

"All right, then. It must be," continued Jean, in a melancholy tone, tinged with contempt for his lack of forethought, "it must be that last night's experience weakened my brain, to have made me overlook all that."

"Don't expose yourself uselessly," said Bertha, almost joyously, looking forward to the *tête-à-tête* with her beloved which circumstances were arranging for her.

"Never fear," replied Oullier.

Trigaud took Michel in his arms, without, however, putting down Aubin, which would have made him lose time, and waded into the water, until it came up to his waist; then, as it grew deeper he held the young man above his head, ready to hand him to Courte-Joie if it continued to deepen; but it stopped at the giant's chest. He crossed the pond to a sort of island, some twelve feet square, which lay like an enormous nest of wild ducks on the sleeping expanse of water. It was covered with a veritable forest of reeds.

Trigaud laid Michel down upon the reeds, and returned to the shore for Bertha whom he carried across in the same fashion, and put her down as he might have done a bird, beside the young baron.

"Lie down in the middle of the island," cried Jean Oullier from the shore. "Straighten up the reeds you have bent, and I promise you no one will look for you there."

"Good!" replied Bertha. "Now, my friends, take some little thought for yourselves."

CHAPTER XV.

WHEREIN THE HOUSE OF AUBIN COURTE-JOIE AND
COMPANY DOES HONOR TO ITS NAME.

It was high time for the Chouans to finish what they had to do on the shore of the pond, for the flames were moving on with tremendous rapidity. They pounced upon the flowering stocks of the furze-bushes like purple and gold birds floating on the wind, and seemed to desire only to breathe upon their stocks before burning them to the ground.

Their muttering grew to a roaring like that of the ocean on all sides of the three fugitives, and the smoke became every moment thicker and more suffocating.

But the muscles of steel of Jean Oullier and Trigaud moved even more swiftly than the fire, and they were soon out of all danger from its assaults.

They struck off diagonally to the left, and reached a point in the valley where they were almost free from the thick clouds which had served so happily to conceal their number, and the direction in which they had fled, as well as the manœuvre by which Michel and Bertha were placed out of harm's way.

"Crawl, Trigaud, crawl!" cried Jean; "it's very important that we should not be seen by the soldiers until we know what they are doing, and which way they are heading."

The giant stooped, and began to go on all fours, and fortunate it was for him; for he had no sooner bent

over than a bullet went whistling over his head, just about where his breast would have been, had he been standing erect.

"The devil!" ejaculated Aubin, "that was very good advice of yours, Jean Oullier,—very good, indeed!"

"They have guessed our trick," said Jean, "and have cut us off, in that direction, at all events."

At that moment they discovered a line of soldiers stretching out half a league from the bowlder, about a hundred yards apart, like a party of huntsmen beating up game; waiting for the Vendéans to re-appear.

"Shall we make a dash for it?" asked Courte-Joie.

"That's my advice," said Jean; "but wait till I make a hole."

Putting his gun to his shoulder (without quitting his recumbent position) he fired upon the soldier, who was re-loading his weapon. The poor wretch, shot through the heart, staggered, and fell face downward.

"One!" said Oullier.

Turning his attention then to the man next in line, he took aim and fired as calmly as if the man were a partridge. The second fell like the first.

"Two!" shouted Aubin. "Bravo, *gars* Oullier, bravo!"

"Forward! forward!" cried Jean, springing to his feet with the agility of a panther; "forward, and scatter a little so as to make a smaller mark for the bullets which will rain down on us."

His prognostication was accurate; the three had not taken ten steps before six or eight reports rang out in quick succession, and one of the missiles chipped a piece off Trigaud's club.

Luckily for the fugitives, the soldiers, who came rushing from all sides to the relief of their fallen comrades,

were all out of breath, and fired with unsteady hands; nevertheless they blocked the way, and it was not probable that Oullier and his companions would have time to get through the line without a hand-to-hand fight.

Indeed, just as Oullier, who was on the left, was gathering himself to spring across a little gully, he saw a shako rise on the opposite side, and beneath the shako a soldier waiting for him with fixed bayonet.

In his haste, he had had no time to re-load his gun, but he fancied that his adversary was in the same situation, as he was content to threaten him with his bayonet. Taking the risk, he drew his knife, and put it between his teeth, and kept on his course as fast as his legs could carry him. Within two steps of the gully he stopped short, and drew a bead on the soldier, who was not more than six feet from the muzzle of his gun.

It happened as Jean had anticipated; the soldier supposed the gun was loaded, and threw himself flat on the ground to avoid the shot.

On the instant, as if his momentary check had in no wise diminished the force of his spring, Jean leaped the gully at a bound, and passed like a flash over the soldier's body.

Trigaud, for his part, was no less fortunate, and he and his master crossed the line with no other mishap than the addition of one tatter more to the tatters of which his clothing was composed, by a bullet which grazed his shoulder.

The two fugitives — Trigaud and Aubin counting as one only — then bore away diagonally, one to the right and the other to the left on converging lines. In five minutes they were within speaking distance of each other.

"Is everything all right?" asked Oullier.

"As right as can be," replied Aubin; "in twenty minutes, unless we have a wing clipped by those villains' bullets, we shall see the fields. Let us once get behind the first hedge, and if they overtake us, I'll be damned! That was a bad idea of ours, *gars* Oullier, to take to the moor."

"Nonsense! here we are well out of it, and the children are safer where we put them than they would be in the thickest forest. You're not wounded, are you?"

"No; but how about you, Trigaud? I thought I felt a sort of shiver under your skin."

The giant pointed to the notch in his club; evidently that mishap which destroyed the symmetry of the job he had worked over so fondly all the morning, worried him much more than the damage the other bullet had done to his garments and his deltoid muscle.

"Ah, that's famous!" said Courte-Joie; "see, there are the fields."

It was indeed the fact that a thousand yards or so away, at the foot of a slope so gradual that the eye could scarcely detect it, the half-ripened wheat could be seen waving to and fro in its sheathing of green.

"Suppose we take a little breath," said Courte-Joie, who seemed to feel Trigaud's fatigue for him.

"Faith! yes," said Oullier, "long enough to re-load my gun. Just look sharp, meanwhile!"

Courte-Joie gazed about in every direction while Jean was re-loading.

"Oh, ten thousand million thunders!" cried the cripple, suddenly, just as the old man was driving home the charge.

"What's the matter?" said Jean.

"Forward, thousand devils! forward! I can see

nothing as yet, but I hear something which bodes no good."

"*Ouais!*" exclaimed Jean, "they are doing us the honor of sending cavalry after us, *gars* Courte-Joie. Up with you! up with you, loafer!" he added, addressing Trigaud.

The giant, as much to relieve his lungs as by way of reply to Oullier, uttered a sort of bellow which the sturdiest Poitou bull might have envied, and with one leap cleared an enormous rock which lay in his path.

A sharp cry of pain from Jean Oullier stopped him.

"What's the trouble?" asked Courte-Joie, for Jean had halted, and was leaning on his gun with his leg in the air.

"Nothing, nothing," said Jean; "don't worry about me."

He tried again to walk, uttered another cry, and was obliged to sit down.

"Oh, we won't go on without you," said Courte-Joie. "Tell us what the matter is."

"Nothing, I tell you."

"Are you wounded?"

"Oh," groaned Jean, "where is the Montbert bone-setter?"

"What did you say?" asked Aubin, not catching his meaning.

"I say that I put my foot in a hole, and either dislocated or sprained it, so that I actually can't take a step—"

"Trigaud will carry you on one shoulder and me on the other."

"Impossible! you would never get to the hedges."

"But if we leave you behind, they will kill you, my Jean Oullier."

"Perhaps so," said the Vendean; "but I will kill more than one of them before I die. Just for a beginning, see me bring that fellow down."

A young officer of chasseurs, better mounted than the others, appeared just then on a little eminence hardly three hundred steps from the fugitives.

Jean Oullier carried his gun to his shoulder and fired. The young officer waved his arms wildly, and fell backward.

And Jean went coolly to work re-loading.

"So you say that you can't walk?" said Aubin.

"I might perhaps hop ten or fifteen feet, but what's the use?"

"Stop here, Trigaud, if that's the case."

"You are not crazy enough to think of staying here, I hope?"

"Faith, yes, just that! Where you die, we will die, my old friend; but as you say, we will bring down a few of them first."

"No, no, indeed, Courte-Joie; it can't be allowed. You must live to look out for the ones we left over yonder. What in Heaven's name are you doing, Trigaud?" he added, as the giant went down into a gully and picked up a block of granite.

"He's all right," said Courte-Joie; "don't scold him. He won't waste his time."

"Look, look," cried Trigaud, pointing to a sort of hole scooped out by the water underneath the rock which he had brought to light by raising it.

"Upon my word, he's as shrewd as a monkey, this rascal of a Trigaud! Come here, Jean Oullier, and slip in under there — quick, quick!"

Jean hobbled up to his companions, crawled into the hole, and curled himself up there in water that was knee-

deep, after which Trigaud gently replaced the stone in its former position, yet in such a way as to let in a little light and air to the man who was walled up alive by it, as by the door of a tomb.

He had just finished when the horsemen appeared on top of the ridge, and having satisfied themselves that the officer was really dead, galloped at full speed after the Chouans.

All hope was not lost, however. Trigaud and Courte-Joie — the only ones with whom we are now concerned — were within fifty paces of a hedge, on the other side of which was certain salvation, especially as the foot-soldiers seemed to have abandoned the pursuit when the cavalry took a hand in it.

But a non-commissioned officer of chasseurs, splendidly mounted, was so close upon them that Courte-Joie could almost feel the horse's hot breath upon his face.

The officer, with the purpose of bringing the affair to a crisis, rose in his stirrups, and aimed such a blow at the cripple with his sword, that he would infallibly have cut his head in two, had it not been for the horse, who swerved to the right (his rider not having him in perfect control) just as Trigaud, as if by instinct, dodged the other way.

The weapon therefore missed its aim, and merely inflicted a slight flesh wound on the inn-keeper's arm.

"About, face!" cried Courte-Joie to Trigaud, as if he were putting him through the manual.

The giant wheeled around precisely as if his movements were governed by a steel spring.

The horse, in passing, struck him with his chest, but without disturbing his equilibrium, and at the same moment Courte-Joie, discharging one barrel of his fowling-piece, killed the officer, who was carried on by his horse.

"One!" Trigaud counted, the imminence of the danger having developed extraordinary loquacity in him.

During the minute consumed by this episode, the other horsemen had drawn much nearer; only a few horses' lengths separated them from the two Vendéans, who could distinguish above the trampling of their horses the sharp click of the hammer of muskets and pistols, which were being prepared for their benefit.

But two seconds were sufficient for Courte-Joie to estimate the possible resources of the spot.

They had reached the limit of the Bouaimé moor, some few yards from the junction of four roads. Like all the cross-roads in La Vendée and Bretagne, this had its cross; this one was of stone, broken half way across, and could at best afford but temporary shelter. To the right were the first hedges, marking the boundaries of the tillage lands; but there was not the slightest hope of reaching them, for several horsemen, divining their intention, rode off diagonally in that direction. In front of them, and running off to their left, was the Maine, which made a bend at that point. But Courte-Joie could not dream of putting the river between the soldiers and himself, for the opposite bank was a cliff rising sheer from the water; and if they followed down the stream to find a place to land, they would certainly be riddled with bullets.

Therefore Courte-Joie decided to try the cross; and Trigaud, at his command, turned in that direction. As he was running around the stone monument, to get it between himself and the soldiers, a bullet struck the cross, and rebounding wounded Aubin in the cheek, but did not prevent him from returning the fire.

Unfortunately, however, the blood which flowed from

the wound fell upon Trigaud's hands. His eye fell upon it, and roaring with rage, apparently oblivious of everything except his companion's injury, he rushed upon the soldiers, as a wild boar at bay upon the hunters.

He and Courte-Joie were at once surrounded, ten swords were brandished above their heads, ten pistol-barrels covered their bodies, and a gendarme put out his hand to seize Aubin.

But Trigaud's mighty club fell, and in falling encountered the gendarme's leg, and broke it.

The poor wretch shrieked with agony and fell from his horse, which galloped off across the moor.

Ten reports rang out on the instant. Trigaud received a ball in his breast, and Aubin's left arm hung at his side, broken in two places.

The beggar seemed utterly insensible to pain; he used his tree-trunk like a small wind-mill, and broke two or three swords, and sent others flying out of their owners' hands.

"To the cross! to the cross!" cried Aubin. "That's a good place to die."

"Yes," replied Trigaud, in a voice like the growl of an angry wild beast; as he heard his master speak, he brought his club down with nervous energy on the head of a chasseur, who fell to the ground, dead.

Then he put in execution the order he had received, walking backward to the cross, to shelter his rider with his body as well as he could.

"Thousand devils!" cried a brigadier, "we're wasting too much time and powder, and too many men on these two beggars."

As he spoke he plied rein and spur to such effect that his horse gave a prodigious spring, and landed him almost on top of the Vendéans.

The animal's head struck Trigaud full in the chest, and so great was the force of the blow that the giant fell upon his knees.

The horseman took advantage of his fall to aim a blow at Courte-Joie, which broke his skull.

"Throw me down at the foot of the cross, and save yourself if you can," said Courte-Joie, in a failing voice; "for it's all up with me."

Then he began to pray:—

"Receive my soul, O my God!"

But the giant was not listening. Drunk with the sight of blood and with rage, he was uttering hoarse and unintelligible roars, like a lion at bay; his eyes, ordinarily dull and lustreless, shot flame; his set lips disclosed his clinched, threatening teeth, which were quite capable of giving a tiger as good as he sent. The horse's impetus had carried its rider some paces beyond, so that Trigaud could not reach him; so he whirled his club over his head, and, measuring with his eye the distance, threw the huge trunk at him with all his force. It hissed through the air as if shot from a catapult; the trooper avoided the blow by making his horse rear, and the poor beast received it on the head.

He pawed the air with his fore-feet, then fell backwards, and rolled over upon the moor with his rider beneath him.

Trigaud emitted a cry of delight, more terrible than a shriek of pain would have been. The horseman's leg was caught under the horse; he pounced upon him, warding off with his lacerated arm the sword-thrust he aimed at him, seized him by the leg, and pulled him clear of the horse; then, twirling him about in the air as a child does with a sling, he dashed out his brains against one of the arms of the cross.

The Byzantine stone rocked upon its base, and remained in a slanting position, covered with blood.

A cry of horror and for vengeance arose from the troop; but as this specimen of Trigaud's might had made them very chary of venturing near him, they set about re-loading their guns.

Meanwhile Courte-Joie breathed his last, saying in a loud voice, —

“Amen!”

Thereupon Trigaud, realizing that his beloved master was dead, sat down upon the base of the cross, as if the preparations the chasseurs were making had no interest for him, released Courte-Joie's body from its fastenings, and laid him on his knees, as a mother might do with the body of her dead child, wiping away with his sleeve the blood from his face, while a torrent of tears, the first which that extraordinary creature, insensible to all life's misery, had ever shed, poured down his cheeks, mingling with the blood, and assisting him in the task he had in hand.

A tremendous report, two fresh wounds, the dull, dead thud produced by three or four bullets entering the corpse which Trigaud held between his arms and strained to his heart, aroused him from his grief and impassibility.

He rose to his full height; and at this movement the chasseurs, thinking that he was about to charge upon them, held their horses well in hand, and shuddered, in anticipation of what was coming.

But the beggar did not even look at them; he had forgotten their existence. His one thought was to find some way of not being separated from his friend after death; and he seemed to be looking for a spot which would offer him some assurance that they would be together for eternity.

He turned in the direction of the Maine.

In spite of his wounds, and the blood which was flowing freely from five or six bullet-holes, and left a red stream behind him, he walked upright, and with a firm step. He reached the river-bank before a single soldier thought of such a thing as preventing him, halted at a spot where the stillness of the black water denoted its great depth, and folded the poor cripple's body in a still closer embrace. Then, still holding him close against his breast, and collecting all his remaining strength, he darted forward, without a word.

The water splashed noisily under the enormous mass which it received in its embrace; and for a long time the spot where Trigaud and his companion disappeared was marked by bubbles which became broad circles, and finally were broken against the banks.

The soldiers ran to the spot, believing that the beggar's purpose was to reach the other shore; and with pistol in hand and musket on the pommel, they held themselves in readiness to fire upon him the instant he came to the surface to breathe.

But Trigaud did not show himself again. His soul had gone to seek the soul of the only being he had ever loved on earth, and their bodies lay gently upon a bed of reeds at the bottom of the Maine.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEREIN HELP ARRIVES FROM A QUARTER WHENCE
IT WAS HARDLY EXPECTED.

DURING the week which had passed, Master Courtin prudently kept himself very shady and quiet behind the walls of his farmhouse at La Logerie.

Like all diplomats, Master Courtin was not very fond of war. He shrewdly calculated that the season of sword-cuts and sharp-shooting would speedily pass; and his only thought was to keep fresh and lively, waiting for the moment when he might be of use to the cause and to himself, according to the petty means Nature had granted him.

Then, too, he was not wholly free from anxiety — this far-seeing farmer — as to the consequences to which his part in the arrest of Jean Oullier and the death of Bonneville might lead; and when hatred and rancor and vengeance were keeping the country overrun with armed men, he thought it wise not to put himself in their way.

Indeed, inoffensive as his young master, Baron Michel, was known to be, he had no overpowering desire to meet him since a certain evening when he cut his horse's girths. And so, the day after that exploit, thinking that the best way to escape death was to make himself out half-dead, he wrapped himself up in his bed-clothes, and caused his servant-girl to inform his neighbors and hired men that a fever of

the most malignant type—like that which carried off poor old Tinguy—had brought him to the door of the tomb.

Madame de la Logerie, in her overwhelming distress at Michel's flight, had sent twice for her farmer; but Courtin's good-will toward her was asleep for the time. So that the proud baronne at last yielded to her anxiety so far as to go herself to the peasant's abode.

She had heard that Michel had been taken prisoner. She was on her way to Nantes, to use all her influence to procure her son's release and all her maternal authority to drag him a long way from that wretched province.

In any event, she did not propose to return to La Logerie for some time, because it seemed hazardous to live there, in view of the conflict which was imminent; and she wished to see Courtin, to request him to have an eye on her mansion.

Courtin promised to merit her confidence; but his voice was so mournful, and he seemed to be suffering so keenly, that the baronne, with all her personal unrest, left the farmhouse with a heart overflowing with compassion for the poor devil.

Then came the engagements of Chêne and La Pénissière.

The day of these engagements, the noise of the firing which came to his ears redoubled his uneasiness; but, on the other hand, when he learned the result of the fighting, he was quite restored to health.

The following day he felt so much like himself again that he determined, disregarding the remonstrances of his servant, to go to Montaigu to receive orders from M. le Sous-préfet as to his proper course of conduct.

The vulture smelt blood, and wanted his trifling share of the spoils.

At Montaigne he found that he had made his journey for nothing. The department had just been placed under martial law, and the sub-prefect directed him to go for orders to the general, who was just then at Aigrefeuille.

Dermoncourt, entirely wrapped up in the movements of his forces, and having, as a brave and loyal soldier, little sympathy with such fellows as Courtin, listened absent-mindedly to the denunciations he thought himself in duty bound to make, in the guise of reports, and treated him with a cold dignity which froze the blood of La Logerie's worthy mayor.

He accepted, however, Courtin's proposition to station a garrison at the château, the position of which seemed to him to be admirably adapted to hold in check the country between Machecoul and Saint Colombin.

Heaven surely owed the farmer some recompense for the very moderate sympathy exhibited by the general. Such recompense it did not delay in its justice to mete out to him.

As he left the house used for headquarters, Master Courtin was accosted by a personage whom he was not conscious that he had ever met before, and who, nevertheless, exhibited the utmost courtesy and touching affability.

He was a man of some thirty years, dressed throughout in black clothes, of a cut closely resembling that of clerical vestments. He had a low forehead, and his nose was curved like the beak of a bird of prey; his lips were thin, but were, nevertheless, very prominent because of a curious formation of the jaw. His pointed chin protruded forward at a very sharp angle; his jet-black hair was glued to his temples. His gray eyes, frequently half-closed, gave one the impression of being

able to see through his blinking eyelids. They were the features of a Jesuit grafted upon the face of a Jew.

A few words to Courtin seemed to dispel the distrust with which he had received the unknown's somewhat suspicious advances. He cheerfully accepted an invitation to dinner at the Hotel Saint Pierre; and after a two hours' *tête-à-tête* in the apartment where the man whose portrait we have drawn ordered the table to be laid, they reached so complete a mutual understanding that they were treating one another as old friends, that they exchanged a very hearty hand-shake at parting, and that the good mayor, as he pricked his nag with the spur, reiterated his promise that the unknown should soon hear from him.

Toward nine in the evening, Master Courtin was travelling along with his horse's head toward La Logerie and his tail toward Aigrefeuille. He seemed very happy and light-hearted, and was whisking his leather-handled stick about from right to left and from left to right upon his little horse's quarters, with a careless ease and swagger which were strange to him.

Master Courtin's brain was evidently stuffed with ideas of a roseate hue. He was thinking, first of all, that when he awoke the next day he would have, within gun-shot of his farmhouse, half a hundred fine little soldiers, whose neighborhood would set his mind at rest, both as to the consequences of what he had done and the results of what he was about to do. He was thinking that, by virtue of his authority as mayor, he could perhaps make use of these fifty bayonets to serve his own little enmities.

This thought satisfied his hatred and his self-esteem at the same time.

But despite the seductiveness of this prospect of a

prætorian guard, which might, with a little address, be turned to his purposes, it was not of itself sufficient to cause Master Courtin — who was a practical man, if ever there was one — such exuberant satisfaction.

There could be no doubt that the stranger had dangled before his eyes something more substantial than the chaff of ephemeral fame; for they were nothing more nor less than heaps of gold and silver which Courtin could descry in the mists of the future, and toward which he held out his hand mechanically, and with a smile of avarice.

Under the sway of these pleasant fancies, and somewhat heavy with the fumes of the wine with which the stranger had lavishly supplied him, Master Courtin allowed himself to drop into gentle slumber. His body rolled from side to side, according to his nag's idiosyncrasies of gait; so that when the beast's foot struck a stone, Master Courtin fell forward and doubled up on the pommel.

The position was an awkward one, and yet Master Courtin was not anxious to change it. He was having, at that moment, a dream so delicious that not for anything on earth would he have chosen to put an end to it by waking up.

He dreamed that he met his young master, who said to him, stretching out his hand over the estate of La Logerie, "All this is yours!"

The gift was even more munificent than it seemed at first sight, and Courtin found it to be a source of incalculable wealth.

The apple-trees in the orchard were weighed down with gold and silver fruit, and all the poles the neighborhood could furnish were not sufficient to keep the branches from bending and breaking beneath the burden.

The eglantine and white-thorn bushes bore, instead

of their red and black berries, gems of all colors of the rainbow, which sparkled in the sun like carbuncles; and there were such quantities of them that, although he was fully convinced that they were precious stones, Master Courtin was but slightly put out when he spied a little marauder filling his pockets with them.

He entered his stable, where he found a row of fat kine extending as far as the eye could see,—so far, so far, that the one nearest the door seemed to him of elephantine size, while the last in line was no larger than a worm.

By the side of each cow was a young girl, milking; and the two nearest him were strangely like the two She-wolves,—the daughters of the Marquis de Souday.

Between their fingers there flowed, from the bags of the first two cows, an enormous stream, alternately white and yellow, but always glowing, like fusing metals. As it fell into the copper pails which the maidens held, it produced that sound—so sweet to the ear—of gold and silver coins tinkling against one another. The happy farmer, looking into the pails, saw that they were half filled with the precious pieces of metal, bearing the effigy of various monarchs of France.

He was putting forth his greedy, trembling hands to grasp them, when a violent concussion, accompanied by an agonizing cry of entreaty, roughly brought his pleasant illusions to an end.

Courtin opened his eyes, and saw in the gloom a peasant woman, with dishevelled hair and garments in disorder, holding out her hands to him imploringly.

"What do you want?" cried Courtin, in his gruffest voice, and with a threatening motion of his whip.

"Help, good man. I ask it in God's name!"

When he found that his compassion was appealed to, and that he had only a woman to deal with, Master Courtin, who had received a decided fright, completely recovered his serenity.

"It's a criminal offence, my dear, to stop people on the road like this, to ask alms."

"Alms! Who spoke of alms?" retorted the stranger, in a voice whose dignified and haughty tone made an impression upon Courtin. "I want you to help me take care of a poor man, who is dying of fatigue and cold. I want you to lend me your horse to take him to some farmhouse near by."

"Who is the man in question?"

"Your costume tells me that you belong hereabouts, therefore I don't hesitate to tell you; for I am sure that you would never dream of betraying me, even if your opinions are not ours. He's a Royalist officer."

The tones of the stranger's voice excited Courtin's curiosity beyond measure. He leaned forward over his horse's neck to try and make out the owner of the voice, but without success.

"Pray, who are you, yourself?" he asked.

"What difference does that make?"

"Do you suppose I am going to lend my horse to people I don't know?"

"Evidently I am on the wrong road. Your reply proves to me that I made a mistake in addressing you either as a friend or a loyal enemy. I see that I must use other means of persuasion. You will give me your horse, this instant!"

"Indeed?"

"You have two minutes to make up your mind."

"And suppose I decline?"

"I will blow your brains out," replied the peasant,

pointing a pistol at his head and cocking it in a determined way, which indicated that the execution of the threat would follow close upon the threat itself.

"Ah, now I know you!" exclaimed Courtin. "You are Mademoiselle de Souday."

And without giving her time to insist further, he climbed down from his horse.

"Very well!" rejoined Bertha (for it was she), "now tell me your name, and the horse shall be returned to your door, in the morning."

"There will be no need of that; for I propose to assist you, in person."

"You do? Why this sudden change?"

"Because I can guess that the person you ask me to help is the proprietor of my farm."

"His name?"

"M. Michel de la Logerie."

"Oho, so you are one of his tenants? Good! we shall have a house to put him in."

"But," faltered Courtin, who was far from comfortable at the thought of meeting the young baron face to face, especially as Jean Oullier would inevitably pay his house a visit if Bertha were there, — "but you see I am mayor, and —"

"You are afraid of compromising yourself for your master!" retorted Bertha, with the utmost contempt.

"Oh, no, indeed! I would give my blood for the young man; but we are going to have a strong garrison right in the château."

"All the better! They will never suspect that Vendéans — rebels — would seek shelter so near them."

"But I should think — I am speaking wholly in M. le Baron's interest — that Jean Oullier could find a much safer hiding-place for you than my house, where

soldiers will be coming and going from morning till night."

"Alas! poor Jean Oullier's affection for his friends will probably be of little account henceforth."

"Why so?"

"This morning we heard sharp firing on the moor. We didn't stir, as he had told us not to; but we waited for him in vain. Jean Oullier is either dead or a prisoner; for he is not the kind of man to go back on his friends."

If the sun had been shining, it would have been difficult for Courtin to conceal his delight at this information, which removed the cause of his keenest anxiety. But if he was not master of his features, he was of his words; and he replied to Bertha's gloomy forebodings in a voice so broken with grief, and with such apparently sincere expressions of regret, that the maiden felt somewhat more kindly toward him.

"Let us go faster," said Bertha.

"Gladly. But what a strong smell of smoke there is here!"

"Ycs; they set the heather on fire."

"Aha! And how did it happen that M. le Baron was not burned? The fire seems to have been in the direction we're going."

"Jean Oullier stowed us away among the reeds in Fréneuse Pond."

"Indeed! That's why I found your clothes all drenched, when I took hold of your arm just now to keep you from falling?"

"Yes. As Jean Oullier didn't come back, I came ashore for help. As I met no one, I took Michel on my shoulders and carried him over. I hoped I could carry him so to the nearest house, but I was not strong

enough; I was obliged to lay him down in the heather, and go back to the road alone. It's twenty-four hours since we had anything to eat."

"Upon my word, you're a girl in ten thousand!" said Courtin, who, in his uncertainty as to the reception he was likely to meet with from his young master, was not sorry to worm himself into Bertha's good graces. "You're just the kind of housekeeper M. le Baron needs in such times as these."

"Isn't it my duty to give my life for him?" asked Bertha.

"Yes," said Courtin, emphatically; "and I am ready to take my oath that no one understands that duty so well as you do. But calm yourself, pray; and don't go so fast."

"I must, for he is suffering! I must; for he will be calling for me, if he has come out of his swoon."

"Was he in a swoon?" cried Courtin, who saw in that fact a possibility of avoiding an immediate explanation.

"To be sure, poor child! Just consider that he is wounded."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

"And consider that for twenty-four hours, weak and delicate as he is, he has received nothing but ineffectual care, so to speak."

"Ah, just Heaven!"

"Consider that he has been lying there all day in the reeds, exposed to the scorching heat of the sun. Consider that the mist soaked his clothes this evening, in spite of all I could do, and he had a chill!"

"*Jésus Seigneur!*"

"Ah, if any ill comes to him, I shall spend my whole life expiating my crime in exposing him to perils which

he was so ill-suited to face!" cried Bertha, whose political ardor was entirely lost from sight under the stress of the bitter grief caused by the sufferings of her beloved Michel.

As for Courtin, the assurance he felt from what she said,—that Michel was in no condition to talk,—seemed to have doubled the length of his legs. Bertha had no further occasion to urge him on. He kept fully abreast of her, and, with extraordinary energy, dragged along his demure nag, who was decidedly averse to travelling over the smoking ground.

Rid forever of Jean Oullier, Courtin fancied that he could easily make such explanations to his young master that the reconciliation would come about of itself.

They soon reached the spot where Bertha had left Michel. The youth was sitting with his back against a stone and his head hanging forward on his chest; and while not precisely unconscious, he was in that condition of absolute prostration which allows one to form but a vague and confused idea of what is going on. He paid no attention whatever to Courtin; and when that worthy, with Bertha's assistance, had lifted him upon the horse's back, he pressed his hand, as he pressed Bertha's, without knowing what he did.

Courtin and Bertha walked on either side of the horse, holding Michel in the saddle. Without their support, he would inevitably have fallen off.

They reached La Logerie. Courtin awoke his servant, who could be relied upon, he said, like all the peasant women of Le Bocage. He took from his own bed the only mattress which the house afforded, and installed the youth in a loft above his room, and all with such an exhibition of zealous self-sacrifice and such protestations of affectionate interest that Bertha

ended by regretting the bad opinion she had formed of him when she first accosted him on the road.

When Michel's wound had been dressed, and he was resting quietly in the bed that had been prepared for him, Bertha went to the servant's room to snatch a little rest herself.

Left alone, Master Courtin gleefully rubbed his hands. It had been a great evening for him.

Violence had not succeeded with him thus far, and he came to the conclusion that mild measures were much more likely to be efficacious. He had done better than make his way into the enemy's camp; for he had set up that camp in his own house, and everything seemed to justify the hope that he would succeed in discovering the secret designs of the Whites, especially those which related to the whereabouts of Petit-Pierre.

He passed in review the instructions he had received from the stranger at Aigrefeuille, the most important of which was to notify him on the instant if he succeeded in discovering the hiding-place of La Vendée's heroine, and to give no information at all to the generals, who were a class of men who took little interest in the fine points of diplomacy, and were altogether beneath the lofty schemes of clever politicians.

Through Michel and Bertha, it seemed possible to Courtin to find out Madame's hiding-place. He began to think that dreams were not always lies, and through the instrumentality of the two young people, the wells of gold and silver and precious stones and the rivers of coined milk might well become tangible facts.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE HIGH-ROAD.

MEANWHILE Mary heard nothing of Bertha.

Since the evening she had left the Jacquet mill, declaring her intention of finding Michel, Mary had no idea what had become of her sister.

Her mind wore itself out in conjecture.

Had Michel spoken? Had Bertha, in despair, carried out some suddenly formed, desperate resolve? Was the poor boy wounded — or dead? Had Bertha been shot in the course of her adventurous wanderings? Such were the gloomy alternatives which occurred to Mary regarding the probable fate of the two dearest objects of her love; all alike left her a prey to most exquisite mental anguish, to the keenest anxiety.

She told herself that the wandering life she was leading in attendance upon Petit-Pierre, forced as they were every afternoon to leave the place which had given them shelter the preceding night, would make it very hard for Bertha to trace them; yet it seemed to her that, in the absence of some mishap, Bertha would have found some way, considering the good understanding that existed between the Royalists and the peasants, to advise her of her doings.

Her heart, already shaken by all the shocks it had undergone, sank beneath this latest blow. Quite alone, without vent for her emotion, deprived of the young baron's presence, which had sustained her in the first

bitter struggle, she fell into a state of gloomy melancholy, and succumbed beneath her sorrow. Her days, which she should have employed in sleeping to repair the fatigues of the night, were passed in watching for the coming of Bertha, or of a messenger who never arrived; and during long, weary hours, she remained so absorbed in her grief that she did not reply when she was spoken to.

Beyond all possibility of doubt, Mary loved her sister. The incredible sacrifice she had voluntarily made to assure Bertha's happiness, abundantly proved that fact; and yet she confessed to herself, with a blush, that it was not Bertha's fate with which her mind was mainly occupied.

Sincere and earnest though her affection for Bertha was, another sentiment, much more imperious, had found its way into her heart, and fed upon the sorrow which it introduced there. Despite all the efforts of the maiden, the sacrifice of which we have spoken had never succeeded in detaching her heart from him who was the object of it. Now that she and Michel were separated, the poor child thought that she might without danger cherish a thought which she formerly tried to expel from her brain, and little by little Michel's image had taken such absolute possession of her heart that it was never absent from it for a single moment.

Amid the horrible sufferings of her existence, the sorrow caused by the thought of her lover came to her with some consoling power; she gave herself up to it with a sort of intoxication. Day by day her tears were devoted more and more to him, and he occupied a more and more prominent place in her anxiety at her sister's prolonged absence.

After having abandoned herself unreservedly to her despair, after having exhausted the possibilities of sin-

ister conjecture, after having evoked most lugubrious pictures of the possible fate of these two beloved beings, after having gone through all the painful alternative solutions of the uncertainty which every passing hour served but to increase, after having anxiously counted the minutes of each of those hours, Mary came to the point where she began to be assailed with regret; and her regret was mingled with self-reproach.

She reviewed in her mind every incident, down to the most trivial, of her intimacy, and her sister's, with Michel.

She asked herself whether she was not to blame for breaking the poor boy's heart, at the same time that she was breaking her own; whether she had the right to dispose of his love; whether she was not responsible for the unhappiness in which she had involved Michel, by forcing him, against his will, to go halves with her in the extraordinary proof she gave of her attachment to her sister.

Then her thoughts led her with irresistible force to the night in the cabin on La Jonchère.

She seemed to see again the ramparts of reeds; she thought she could hear that melodious voice exclaiming, "I love you!" She closed her eyes, and seemed to feel the youth's breath upon her hair, to feel his lips imprinting upon hers the first, the only kiss she had ever received from him,—but a kiss which time could never blot from her memory.

Then the renunciation, which her virtuous affection for her sister had suggested, seemed altogether beyond her strength. She was angry with herself for undertaking a superhuman task; and love resumed possession of her heart with such energy that Mary, ordinarily so pious, and accustomed to seek patience and courage in thoughts

of the life to come, no longer dared to cast her eyes upwards toward heaven. She either remained prostrated with grief, or abandoned herself to impious ravings, in the frenzy of her passion, — asked herself if the impression which her lips retained was all that God chose that she should know of the happiness of being loved, and if it was worth while to live when one was thus disowned.

The Marquis de Souday finally noticed the tremendous change produced by grief upon Mary's features, but he attributed it to excessive weariness.

He was himself much cast down to see all his pleasant dreams vanish and all General Dermoncourt's predictions come true; in seeing, in short, the period of proscription begin again for him, without having seen so much as the dawn of a day of conflict.

But he considered it his bounden duty to show a degree of resolution and energy commensurate with the misfortunes which overwhelmed him, and he would much rather have died than fail in that duty; for it was a soldier's duty, and he was as punctilious regarding everything connected with military honor as he was careless and indifferent about the observance of the amenities of social life.

Therefore, great as was his despondency at heart, he allowed nothing of it to appear; and he made his present wandering and perilous existence the text of a thousand pleasantries, by which he tried to smooth away the wrinkles from the foreheads of his companions, which had become noticeably careworn since the disastrous failure of the uprising.

Mary had told her father of Bertha's departure, and the worthy gentleman had shrewdly divined that her uneasiness as to the fate and the conduct of her betrothed counted for much in the course his daughter had taken.

As eye-witnesses had reported to him that, far from proving recreant to his duty, the young baron had played an heroic part in the defence of La Pénissière, the marquis — supposing that Jean Oullier, upon whose watchfulness and discretion he could absolutely rely, was with his daughter and his future son-in-law — did not think it worth while to worry about Bertha's absence more than a general would do about the fate of one of his officers whom he had sent on an expedition. He could hardly understand, however, why Michel had preferred to win his spurs under Jean Oullier's eye rather than his own, and he was a little put out with him on that account.

On the evening after the engagement at Chêne, Petit-Pierre, surrounded by a few Legitimist leaders, was compelled to leave the Jacquet mill where alarms were altogether too frequent. During the evening, they both saw and heard, on the road which ran close to the mill, squads of soldiers with prisoners in charge.

They set out after nightfall.

As they were about to cross the main road, the little party stumbled upon a detachment; and in order to let it pass, they were obliged to hide in a ditch overhung with bushes, where they lay more than an hour.

The whole country was so beset with flying parties of the enemy that they had to resort to impracticable paths to avoid them.

The next morning they must needs make a fresh start. Petit-Pierre's anxiety was extreme; her physical condition sometimes betrayed her mental anguish, but her words, or her bearing never. Amid a life of constant agitation and gloom, her animation and gayety were never-failing, and more than rivalled the affected high spirits of the Marquis de Souday.

Hunted as they were, the fugitives could never secure a full night's rest; and when day came again, weariness and danger awoke with them. The night journeys which they were forced to resort to, were sometimes dangerous, and always terribly wearisome to Petit-Pierre. She sometimes rode, but generally travelled on foot, through fields, separated by hedges, which they had to crawl through when it was too dark to find an opening; among vines, which in this region creep on the ground and entirely cover it, tangle up the feet, and make one trip at every step; over roads, ploughed up by the ceaseless passage of cattle, so that pedestrians sank in to their knees, and horses to their houghs.

Petit-Pierre's companions began to be concerned for the effect which this life of never-ending emotion and unrelieved fatigue might have upon her health; they deliberated long and earnestly as to the surest means of placing her out of reach of any possible search. They were divided in opinion: some wanted her to go to Paris, where she might easily be lost amid the enormous throngs; others proposed that she should be smuggled into Nantes, where a place of shelter had been arranged for her; others again advised that she should be put on board ship as soon as possible, thinking that she would never be really safe until she had left the country, where the search for her would become more keen as the danger diminished.

The Marquis de Souday was one of the last; but in reply to them it was urged that very close watch was kept all along the coast, and that it would be impossible for any one to embark without a passport at any point.

Petit-Pierre cut short their deliberations by declaring that she would go to Nantes; that she would go on foot, in broad daylight, dressed like a peasant.

As Mary's depression and changed appearance had not escaped her observation, and as she, like the marquis, attributed it to nothing but the fatiguing life they were all leading,—a life which Mary must continue to lead, if she followed her father, until he too found some secure retreat,—she suggested to the marquis that he should allow Mary to accompany her.

He accepted the suggestion with gratitude, but Mary did not resign herself to the plan so easily. Within the walls of a city, would she be likely to receive news of Bertha and Michel, which she was so anxiously awaiting from second to second? On the other hand, it was impossible to refuse; so she yielded.

The next day, which was Saturday, and a market-day, Petit-Pierre and Mary, dressed as peasants, set out about six in the morning.

They had some three and a half leagues to walk.

After travelling half an hour, the hob-nailed shoes, and the cotton stockings, to which Petit-Pierre was not accustomed, began to hurt her feet. Fearing that she might soon be unable to walk at all if she continued to wear them, she sat down, took off shoes and stockings, stuffed them into her capacious pockets, and resumed her journey with bare feet.

In a short time it occurred to her that the peasant women they met might suspect something from the aristocratic whiteness and delicacy of her skin; so she took a handful of black dirt and rubbed her legs with it before going on.

They had reached Sorinières when they saw two mounted gendarmes talking with a peasant, also mounted, in front of a wine-shop.

At the moment Petit-Pierre and Mary were walking in the midst of a group of five or six peasant women,

and the gendarmes paid no attention to them; but Mary, whose mind was occupied with but one subject, and who carefully scrutinized every person they met, anxious to find some one who might be able to give her some inkling as to the fate of Bertha and Michel, — Mary, we say, imagined that the mounted peasant looked at her with special interest.

A few seconds later, she looked around and saw that he had left the gendarmes, and was urging his nag along to overtake the villagers.

"Look out for yourself!" she said, beneath her breath to Petit-Pierre. "There's a man whom I don't know, who stared at me from head to foot, and is now following us; move away from me, and pretend not to know me."

"All right; but suppose he speaks to you, Mary?"

"I will answer him as best I can, never fear."

"In case we are obliged to separate, you know where we are to meet?"

"To be sure. But look out! Let's not talk any more. He's right here."

The horse's hoofs could be heard on the stones as she spoke.

Apparently without design, Mary detached herself from the group, and fell back a few steps. She could not repress a shudder as she heard the man address her.

"So we are going to Nantes, my girl, are we?" said he, drawing in his horse by Mary's side, and beginning to scrutinize her once more with inquisitive persistence.

She pretended to take his remark in good humor.

"*Dame!* you see that I am," said she.

"May I go with you?" the horseman asked.

"Thanks, thanks," said Mary, affecting the speech and accent of the Vendean peasantry; "let me go along with my own people."

"With your own people? You don't expect me to believe that all those young folks ahead of us come from your village?"

"Whether they do or don't, what does it matter to you?" retorted Mary, evading a question which was evidently asked with an object.

The man did not seem to notice her reserve.

"I have a proposition to make," said he.

"Make it."

"Get up behind me."

"Oh, yes, of course!" said Mary; "it would be fine, wouldn't it, to see a poor girl like me with her arms around a man who has almost the appearance of a gentleman!"

"Just as if you weren't accustomed to putting your arms around one who has the appearance of a gentleman, and the tone of one as well!"

"What do you mean?" said Mary, beginning to be uneasy.

"I mean that you may pass for a peasant girl in the eyes of a fool of a gendarme; but as for me, it's another matter, and you are not what you choose to appear, Mademoiselle Mary de Souday."

"If you have no evil designs against me, why do you call my name so loud?" the young girl asked, stopping in the middle of the road.

"Nonsense!" said the man. "What harm is there in that?"

"Why, those women may have heard you; and when you see me in this costume, you may be sure that my interests and my welfare demand it."

"Oho!" exclaimed the horseman, with a wink and a leer, "those women, whom you seem so suspicious of, are in your confidence, my dear."

"No, I swear they 're not!"

"There is one of them at least —"

Mary shivered in spite of herself; but she summoned to her aid all the force of her will.

"Neither one nor many," said she. "But why, I beg, do you ask me all these questions?"

"Because, if you are really alone, as you say, I am going to ask you to stop for a few moments."

"Stop?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose, pray?"

"To save me a fine journey I should have had to take to-morrow if I had n't happened to run across you."

"What journey?"

"Why, to hunt you up!"

"You wanted to find me?"

"Not on my own account, you understand."

"Who, then, intrusted you with that errand?"

"Those who love you, — Mademoiselle Bertha, and M. Michel," he added in a lower tone.

"Bertha? Michel?"

"Yes."

"Then he isn't dead!" cried Mary. "Oh, speak, speak, monsieur! Tell me, I beseech you, what has become of them."

The terrible anxiety betrayed by the tone in which Mary uttered these words, the agonized expression with which she awaited the reply, which seemed likely to be her death-warrant, were remarked with much interest by Courtin, on whose lips flickered a diabolical smile.

He took pleasure in delaying his reply so as to prolong the young girl's agony.

"Oh, no, no, don't worry," he said at last; "he will come out of it all right."

"Is he wounded then?" demanded Mary, eagerly.

"What! you did n't know it?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* wounded!" cried Mary, with tears streaming from her eyes.

There was nothing more for Courtin to learn from Mary; he had seen enough.

"Pshaw!" said he, "the wound won't keep him in bed long, and won't prevent him from attending his own wedding."

Mary felt the blood leave her cheeks, despite her efforts at self-control.

Courtin's last words reminded her that she had not yet asked him for news of her sister.

"And Bertha?" she rejoined; "have you nothing to tell me of her?"

"Your sister! Ah, a fine buxom girl that, on my word! When she has a husband on her arm, she can say it's a blessing she has fairly earned!"

"But she is not sick? She is not wounded?"

"*Dame!* she's ailing a little, that's all."

"Poor Bertha!"

"You see she has done altogether too much; I tell you, there's more than one man who would have died if he had done as much."

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" said Mary, "they are both ill, and both uncared for."

"Oh, no indeed, for they care for each other. You ought to see how your sister, sick as she is, coddles and nurses him! Some men do have all the luck, sure enough! There's M. Michel being spoiled by his future wife as much as he was by his mother. Ah, he ought to love her pretty dearly, if he's not an ingrate."

Mary's agitation was renewed by these remarks, and did not escape the observation of Courtin, who began to smile.

"Well," said he, "would you like me to tell you something that I think I have noticed?"

"What is it?"

"It is this,—that in the matter of hair, M. le Baron prefers light chestnut to the glossiest black."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary, in a tremor.

"If I must explain myself, I will tell you something which will be no great news to you: it is you he loves; and although Bertha may be the name of the one to whom his hand is promised, Mary is the promised bride of his heart."

"Oh," cried Mary; "that's an invention of yours, monsieur; for the Baron de la Logerie can never have told you anything of the sort."

"No, but I found it out all the same. And, as I hold him in the same estimation as the skin of my own body, the dear lamb, I should be very glad to see him happy; so that I promised myself, when your sister told me yesterday that I must bring you news of them,—I promised myself, for my own satisfaction and peace of mind, to tell you what I thought about it."

"You are mistaken in your observations, monsieur," retorted Mary; "M. Michel has no thought for me. He is my sister's betrothed, and he loves her dearly, believe me."

"You do wrong not to have confidence in me, Mademoiselle Mary; for do you know who I am? I am Courtin, M. Michel's principal tenant-farmer,—I might add, his confidential man; and if you will be good enough —"

"Monsieur Courtin, you would oblige me beyond

measure, if you yourself would be good enough to do something — ”

“ What is that ? ”

“ Change the subject. ”

“ Very well ; but first allow me to renew my offer : get up behind me, and make your journey less tiresome. You are going to Nantes, I presume ? ”

“ Yes, ” said Mary, who, although she felt little inclined to trust Courtin, thought she ought not to conceal her destination from M. de la Logerie’s confidential man, as he styled himself.

“ Very well, ” said Courtin, “ as I also am bound there, we will travel together, unless — If you are going to Nantes to execute some commission, and I can do it for you, I will very gladly undertake it, and you will save yourself so much fatigue. ”

Mary, notwithstanding her natural straightforwardness, felt obliged to resort to a falsehood ; for it was of the utmost importance that no one should know the reason of her journey.

“ No, ” said she, “ it ’s impossible. I am going to join my father, who is in hiding at Nantes. ”

“ Indeed ! ” said Courtin. “ Well, well, well, M. le Marquis in hiding at Nantes ! That was well thought of now, and what a joke on those fellows who are looking for him over yonder, and talking of pulling down every stone of the Château de Souday ! ”

“ Who told you so ? ” asked Mary.

Courtin saw that he had made a false step in appearing to know the plans of the agents of the Government ; he tried to repair it as well as he could.

“ *Dame !* ” said he, “ it was mainly to warn you not to return to the château that Mademoiselle your sister sent me to find you. ”

"Well, you see they won't find either my father or myself at Souday," said Mary.

"Ah, çà ! but it occurs to me," said Courtin, as if the thought had really just come into his mind, "that if Mademoiselle your sister and M. de la Logerie wish to keep you informed of their welfare, they ought to know your address."

"I don't yet know it myself," replied Mary. "A man whom I am to meet at the end of the Pont Rousseau will take me to the house where my father is. Once I am there, and with him again, I will write my sister."

"Very good; and if you have any word to send her, or if M. le Baron and she want to join you, and need a guide, I will undertake to oblige them."

He added with a significant smile, —

"Ah, *dame* ! I will answer for it that M. Michel will make me take the trip more than once."

"What, again !" exclaimed Mary.

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I did n't know it would make you so angry."

"Indeed it does; for your suppositions are insulting to your master as well as to me."

"Pshaw! pshaw!" exclaimed Courtin; "that's all talk! A fine fortune is Monsieur le Baron's, and I don't know a young woman within ten leagues who would turn up her nose at it, however wealthy an heiress she may be. Say the word, Mademoiselle Mary," continued the farmer, who thought that every one shared his passion for wealth, — "say the word, and I will do my best to make you the possessor of that fortune."

"Master Courtin," said Mary, stopping short, and regarding the farmer with an expression not to be misunderstood; "I have to remind myself continually of your attachment to M. de la Logerie to refrain from

being angry in good earnest. Once more I request you to change the subject."

Courtin had no expectation of finding Mary's virtue so obstinate; her appellation of "She-wolf" seemed to exclude all possibility of such delicacy of feeling. He was all the more astonished because it was easy to see that she reciprocated the affection which the farmer's inquiring mind had succeeded in unearthing from the recesses of Michel's heart.

For an instant he was disconcerted by her unlooked-for retort.

He might spoil everything by taking too much for granted, so he determined to let the fish get entangled in the net before hauling the net in.

The stranger at Aigrefeuille had told him that the leading Legitimists would probably seek shelter at Nantes. M. de Souday — so Courtin believed, at least — was already there; Mary was on her way there; Petit-Pierre would probably turn up there in due time. Michel's love for Mary would be the Ariadne's thread which would guide him to her hiding-place, which would in all probability be Petit-Pierre's as well, the latter being the real object of Master Courtin's political and ambitious scheming. To insist upon accompanying Mary would be to arouse her suspicions; and great as was his desire to bring his enterprise to a satisfactory conclusion that very day, he decided to adopt a prudent, temporizing policy, and to give Mary some convincing proof of his good faith.

"Aha," said he, "so you turn up your nose at my horse! Do you know it breaks my heart to see your little feet bruising themselves on the stones?"

"It must be, though," said Mary; "I shall be less noticed on foot than riding behind you; and if I dared,

I would ask you not to ride along beside me. Anything that is likely to draw attention to me alarms me; so let me go on alone and overtake those women away ahead of us; I am in the least possible danger in their company."

"You are right," said Courtin, "especially as the gendarmes are right here behind us, and seem to want to overtake us."

Mary started; there were, indeed, two gendarmes following about three hundred yards in their rear.

"Oh, don't be afraid," continued Courtin. "I will cork them up. Go on ahead; but first tell me what I shall say to Mademoiselle your sister."

"Tell her that all my thoughts and all my prayers are for her happiness."

"Is that all the message you have to send?"

The maiden hesitated; she glanced at the farmer, but his features evidently betrayed his secret thoughts, for she lowered her head and said, —

"Yes, all."

Courtin saw, nevertheless, that although she did not pronounce Michel's name, her heart's last word was for him.

He stopped his horse.

Mary, on the other hand, quickened her pace, and tried to overtake the peasant women, who, as we have said, had got far ahead during her talk with Courtin. When she came up with them, she told Petit-Pierre what had passed between the farmer and herself, suppressing, of course, everything which related to the Baron de la Logerie.

Petit-Pierre thought it prudent to conceal herself from the inquisitive gaze of the man whose name aroused unpleasant but vague memories in her mind.

She fell behind with Mary, keeping one eye upon the farmer,—who, as he agreed, had stopped the gendarmes at a wine-shop—and the other upon the peasants, who kept on toward Nantes. When these latter had passed out of sight around a bend in the road, the two fugitives entered a wood about a hundred paces from the road, from the edge of which they could see those who followed them.

In about fifteen minutes Courtin rode by, urging his horse to his highest speed. Unfortunately, he was too far away from their hiding-place for Petit-Pierre to discover that the visitor at the house of Pascal Picaut, the man who cut the girths of Michel's horse, and Mary's questioner were one and the same person.

When he had disappeared, Petit-Pierre and his comrade resumed their journey toward Nantes. As they approached the town where Petit-Pierre had been promised an absolutely secure refuge, their fears abated. Petit-Pierre had become accustomed to her costume, and the farmers they met did not seem to notice that the little peasant who was walking so swiftly along the road was anything other than her dress indicated.

It was a great point to have deceived the keen instinct of the country people, whose only rivals in this regard, if not their superiors, are the born soldiers.

At last they saw Nantes in the distance, and Petit-Pierre put on her shoes and stockings before entering the town.

Mary was disturbed lest Courtin, having failed to overtake them, might be waiting for them. So instead of approaching by the Pont Rousseau, they employed a boat to take them across the Loire.

As they were opposite the Bouffai, Petit-Pierre felt a tap on her shoulder. She started, and turned around.

The person who had indulged in this alarming familiarity was an old woman, on her way to market. She had put her basket of apples on the ground for a moment, and was unable to replace it on her head without assistance.

"Help me, please, little ones," she said, "to put my basket up again, and I'll give you an apple apiece."

Petit-Pierre immediately took one handle, and signed to Mary to take the other; and the basket was replaced and balanced on the old woman's head. She was walking off without giving the promised reward, when Petit-Pierre took her by the arm.

"Say, mother, how about my apple?" said she.

The woman gave her one, and Petit-Pierre was biting into it, with an appetite whetted by a three-league walk, when she happened to raise her head, and her eyes fell on a placard, bearing these words, in enormous letters:—

STATE OF SIEGE.

It was the ministerial proclamation declaring four departments of La Vendée outside the ordinary law.

Petit-Pierre approached the placard and calmly read it from beginning to end, regardless of the entreaties of Mary, who urged her to hurry on to the house where they were expecting her. Petit-Pierre remarked, very sensibly, that the thing was of sufficient importance for her to become thoroughly acquainted with it.

A few moments later, the two peasants started once more, and plunged into the network of dark, narrow streets of the old Breton city.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO JEAN OULLIER.

ALTHOUGH it was well-nigh impossible for the soldiers to discover Jean Oullier in the retreat which poor Trigaud's herculean strength had arranged for him, on the other hand, Trigaud and Courte-Joie being dead, Jean had simply exchanged the dungeon which the Blues had in store for him, if he fell into their hands again, for another more terrible dungeon, — death from their bullets for a far more shocking death.

He was buried alive; and in that deserted region there was but little hope that any one would hear his cries.

Toward the middle of the night following his separation from the beggars, as they did not return, he began to think that something must have gone sadly wrong with them. It was evident that they were either dead or prisoners.

The mere thought of his situation, in that event, was enough to freeze the blood in the veins of the bravest of mankind. But Jean Oullier was one of those men of simple faith, who keep up the fight when the bravest despair.

He commended his soul to God in a short but fervent prayer, and then set about the work in hand as zealously as he had done amid the ruins of La Pénissière.

Up to that time he had been sitting bent over double, with his chin resting on his knees. It was the only position which the scanty proportions of the excavation

permitted him to take. He tried to change it; and after a long struggle, succeeded in kneeling. Then he rested his weight on his hands and knees, and tried to raise the heavy stone with his back and shoulders.

But that which was the merest child's play for Trigaud was an impossibility for any other. Jean Oullier could not even shake the enormous mass the beggar had placed between him and the sky.

He tried the earth under his feet: it was rock like the rest. To right and to left everything was rock; But the piece of granite, which Trigaud had transformed into a huge cover for the improvised box, was inclined forward so that there was a space of some three or four inches between it and the bed of the stream, through which some little light and air entered.

Jean Oullier, having carefully examined the position of affairs, decided to direct his efforts on the side where that space was.

He stuck the point of his knife into a fissure in the rock, and made a chisel of it. The butt of his pistol served as a hammer, and he worked away to enlarge the opening.

He spent twenty-four hours at this task, without any other sustenance than the chasseur's flask of *eau-de-vie*, from which, now and then, he drank a few drops of the stimulating liquid it contained.

During these twenty-four hours his pluck and strong heart never for an instant failed him.

At last, toward evening of the second day, he succeeded in putting his head out through the opening he had dug at the base of his dungeon. His shoulders soon followed his head; and then, with a vigorous effort, he succeeded in dragging the rest of his body into the outer air.

It was time; for his strength was utterly exhausted.

He rose to a kneeling position, then to his feet, and finally tried to walk.

But his sprained foot had swollen frightfully during the thirty-six hours he had passed in that horribly constrained position. At the very first attempt he made to put his weight upon it, every nerve in his body jumped as if it had been twisted. He shrieked, and fell to the ground gasping, fairly overcome by the fearful pain.

Night was approaching. In whichever direction he listened, he could hear no sound of life. He thought that the night, which was beginning to wrap the earth in gloom, would be his last. He commended his soul to God, implored him to watch over the two children he had loved so dearly, who would long since have been orphaned, by their father's indifference, but for him. Last of all, in order that he might throw away no chance, he dragged himself on his hands, or crawled, toward the setting sun, in the direction in which he knew that the nearest houses lay.

He travelled in this way three-quarters of a league or thereabouts, and reached an elevation whence he could see the lights of the scattered houses on the edge of the moor. In his eyes they were so many light-houses which pointed out to him where safety and life were to be found; but strive as he would, it seemed impossible for him to go forward another step.

It was nearly sixty hours since he had tasted food.

The stalks of broom and furze, cut the preceding year and sharpened with the reaping hook, had torn his hands and his chest; and the blood he lost in this way put the finishing touch to his exhaustion.

He rolled over into a ditch which ran by the roadside.

He abandoned the attempt to go on, and resolved to die there.

He was devoured by a burning thirst, and swallowed a few drops of stagnant water from the ditch. He was so weak that he could hardly put his hand to his mouth; his head seemed entirely empty.

From time to time he heard dull and mournful mutterings in his ear, like those made by water in the hold of a ship on the point of sinking. A sort of mist veiled his eyes; and behind it danced millions of sparks, which went out and were lighted again, like phosphorescent gleams.

The poor fellow felt that he was dying.

He tried to cry out, caring little whether he attracted the notice of friends or enemies; but his voice stopped in his throat, and he could scarcely himself hear the hoarse noise he succeeded in emitting.

He remained for an hour in this sort of death agony. Then the curtain which hung before his eyes gradually grew denser, and assumed at the same time all the colors of the rainbow. The buzzing in his brain went through some extraordinary modulations. Finally, he lost all sense of what was going on about him.

But his mighty nature could not yield without another struggle; and the period of lethargic tranquillity, in which he lay for some time, allowed the heart to regulate its beating and the blood to flow less feverishly.

His torpor in no way lessened the keenness of his faculties; he heard a sound, as to which his old experience as a scout left him not a moment in doubt. It was the step of some person on the heather; and further, he recognized it as the step of a woman.

That woman might save him! Even in his benumbed and weakened state he realized that; but when he under-

took to call her, to make a movement to attract her attention, he was like a man in a trance, who sees all the preparations for his own funeral going on around him, without power to interfere. He realized, with horror, that his intelligence alone was alive, and his body, completely paralyzed, refused to obey it.

As the miserable wretch nailed in his coffin makes superhuman struggles to shatter the wall of metal which separates him from the world, Jean Oullier tried every means which Nature had put at the disposal of his will to overcome his physical disability.

It was in vain.

Meanwhile the steps were coming nearer. Each minute, each second brought them to his ears more distinctly, more sharply defined. It seemed to him as if every stone those steps set in motion struck against his heart. Every instant, from the very frequency and violence of his efforts, his agony became keener. His hair stood on end; cold sweat rolled down his forehead. It was more cruel than death itself; for the dead man feels nothing.

The woman passed on. Jean heard the thorns scratching and tearing her skirts, as if they were trying to detain her. He saw her shadow fall upon the bushes. Then she went on, and the sound of her steps died away in the whispering of the wind among the dried furze.

The unfortunate man thought he was lost beyond all hope; and the moment that he ceased to hope, he ceased his horrible struggle with himself. He became somewhat calmer, and again offered up a mental prayer, putting himself in the hands of God.

This outpouring of his soul absorbed him so completely that the loud breathing of a dog, which had poked his head between the branches to investigate with

his nose the cause of the scent he detected from the thicket, was his first warning of the animal's approach.

He made an effort and turned his eyes in that direction, and saw a little pug-dog gazing at him with knowing, frightened-eyes.

Slight as Jean's movement was, the dog quickly drew back his head and began to bark.

Thereupon Jean Oullier thought that he heard the woman call him; but the little fellow kept to his post and continued his barking.

It was the last hope, and it was not blasted. Tired of calling, and curious to ascertain what had so excited her dog, the peasant woman retraced her steps.

Chance—we ought to say Providence—brought it about that the woman was no other than the widow Picaut. She approached the clump of bushes, and spied a man; she leaned over him, and recognized Jean Oullier.

At first sight, she thought he was dead; but she saw that his half-opened eyes were fixed upon her. She laid her hand upon his heart, and found that it was still beating. She raised him then to a sitting posture, threw some water in his face, and forced a little between his clinched teeth. Thereupon, as if the touch of a living being renewed his hold upon life, Jean felt the enormous weight which oppressed him gradually raised. His numbed limbs became warm once more, and he felt the grateful warmth steal gently down to his extremities. Soon tears of gratitude crept out from beneath his eyelids and rolled down his bronzed cheeks. He seized the widow's hand and carried it to his lips, while his tears fell fast upon it.

She, too, appeared deeply moved. Although she was, as we know, a Philippist, the good woman was much attached to the old Chouan.

"Well, well!" she exclaimed; "what does all this mean, my Jean Oullier? I don't see that what I am doing is any more than natural. I would have done just as much for any Christian, much more for you, who are the good God's true man."

"That does n't—" Jean began; but he could get no farther with his first breath.

"Does n't what?" asked the widow.

"That does n't make it any the less true that I owe you my life," he continued.

"Nonsense!" said Marianne.

"Oh, but it's as I say. But for you, La Picaut, I should have died right here."

"But for my dog, you mean, Jean. You see, you must n't thank me, but just God alone.

"For heaven's sake, are you wounded?" she added, seeing that he was all covered with blood.

"No; nothing but scratches. My principal difficulty is a sprained foot; and next to that, going without food for sixty hours. It was weakness, more than anything, that was near being the death of me."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* But just wait a moment. I am carrying dinner to the people who are picking up straw for me on the moor. You shall eat their soup."

As she spoke, the widow set down the bundle she was carrying and untied the four corners of a napkin, in which were several porringers of soup and some smoking-hot boiled beef. She made Jean Oullier swallow a considerable quantity of the soup; and he felt his strength come rushing back as the hot and succulent mess went down into his stomach.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a long breath.

A satisfied smile passed over the grave, sad face of the widow.

"And now," she said, taking a seat opposite Jean, "what do you propose to do? Of course the Red Breeches are after you."

"Alas!" replied Oullier, "I lost all my strength with my poor foot. It will be many months before I can get around, as I must do, in order to avoid rotting in prison. What I must do, you see, is to hunt up Master Jacques; he will give me a corner in one of his burrows, where I can stay till I am cured."

"What about your master and his daughters?"

"Our master will not be in a hurry to return to Souday; and he will do well to keep away."

"What will he do, then?"

"He will go abroad with our young ladies, no doubt."

"That's a fine idea of yours, Jean, — to look for a hospital among that crowd of bandits who follow Master Jacques. You'll be splendidly taken care of there!"

"He's the only one who can take me in without fear of compromising himself."

"You forget me, then, do you? That's not kind, Jean."

"You?"

"Yes, of course."

"Why don't you know of the orders?"

"What orders?"

"Those which determine the penalty incurred by any one who gives shelter to a Chouan."

"Nonsense! My Jean, orders of that sort are made for rascals, not for honest folk."

"And then, again, you detest the Chouans, don't you?"

"No; it's brigands that I hate, in all parties. Those were brigands, for example, who killed my poor Pascal; and upon them I will avenge his death if I can. But

you, Jean Oullier, wear the cockade of a brave and honest man, whether it's white or tricolor; and I will save you."

"But I can't take a step."

"That's not the difficulty. If you could walk, Jean, I would n't dare to take you to my house at this hour of the day. Not that I fear anything that could happen to me; but, you see, since that poor young man's death, I dread treason. Do you crawl back under the bushes and hide yourself as best you can. When it is dark, I will come for you with a wagon. Then, to-morrow, I will go and get the bone-setter from Machecoul; he will pass his hand over the nerves of your foot, and in three days you will be running around like a rabbit."

"Ah, I know that would be much the best way! But —"

"Would n't you do as much for me?"

"I would jump into the fire for you, Marianne, you know."

"Well, then, don't say any more about it. After dark I will come and get you."

"Thanks, I accept your kindness; and be perfectly sure that you are not dealing with an ingrate."

"I don't do it for your gratitude, Jean Oullier, but to do my duty as an honest, upright woman."

She looked around.

"What are you looking after?" Jean asked.

"I was thinking that if you should try to get back among the heather, you would be safer than in this ditch."

"I think it would be impossible," said Oullier, showing the widow his torn hands, his scarred face, and his foot swollen to the size of his head. "I'm not

badly off here, anyway. You rubbed by the bushes without suspecting there was a man behind them."

"True; but a dog may pass and smell you, as mine did. Just consider, Jean Oullier! The war is over; but now the time for denunciation and revenge is coming, if it has not come already."

"Pshaw!" said Jean. "We must leave something for God to do."

The widow was no less devout a believer than the old Chouan. She gave him a piece of bread, and cut some branches, with which she improvised a bed for him. Then, after carefully straightening up the bushes on all sides of him so that he could not be seen by passers-by, she went away, urging him to wait patiently for her.

Oullier disposed himself on the heather as comfortably as possible. He offered up a fervent thanksgiving to the Lord, gnawed his crust of bread, then fell into that heavy sleep which always follows complete prostration.

He had been sleeping several hours, when the sound of voices aroused him. In the sort of half-waking which succeeded his stupor, he thought he heard the names of his young mistresses; and with the tendency to suspicion which men of his temper are wont to exhibit in all their attachments, he at once jumped to the conclusion that some danger was threatening either Bertha or Mary, and found therein a lever which put his torpor to flight in the twinkling of an eye. He raised himself upon his elbow, gently parted the thorns, which formed a dense barricade about him, and looked out upon the road.

It was dark; but not too dark for him to distinguish the figures of two men sitting on a fallen tree on the opposite side of the road.

"How was it that you did n't follow her, when you recognized her?" one of them was saying, in a strongly marked German accent, which left no doubt in Jean Oullier's mind that he was a stranger in that part of the country.

"*Dame!*" the other replied, "I did n't think she was so much of a She-wolf as she seems to be; and she completely fooled me, idiot that I am!"

"You can make up your mind that the person we are after was in the group of peasants whom Mary de Souday left to come and meet you."

"Oh, as far as that goes, you are right, no doubt; for when I asked the women what had become of the young girl who was walking with them, they said that she and her companion had stayed behind."

"Then what did you do?"

"Why, I put up my nag at the inn, concealed myself at the end of Pirmile, and waited for them."

"With no result?"

"With no result, and I waited more than two hours."

"They must have taken a cross-road and got into Nantes by some other bridge."

"Sure."

"That's a great shame; for who knows whether you will ever have such a chance as that again?"

"Oh, yes I shall! Just let me alone."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, as my neighbor, the Marquis de Souday, or my friend Jean Oullier — God rest his soul! — would say, 'I have at home the hound we need for this chase.'"

"A hound?"

"Yes, a real hound. He's a little lame in one of his fore-paws; but as soon as that is cured, I will tie a string round his neck, and he will follow the scent without our

having to do anything except see to it that he does n't break the cord, so as to get there faster."

"Come, stop your joking; these are serious matters we have on hand."

"Joking! what do you take me for? Joking face to face with the fifty thousand francs you promised me! By the way, it was fifty thousand, was n't it?"

"Eh, you ought to know, for you made me repeat it more than twenty times."

"Yes; but I don't get tired of hearing it, any more than I should of counting the crowns if I had them in my hand."

"Just put the person you know of into our hands, and you shall have them."

"Oh, I can hear the chink of the 'yellow-boys' now; dzing! dzing!"

"Meanwhile, just tell me the meaning of this stuff about bloodhounds which you were talking a while ago."

"Oh, I'll tell you; I ask nothing better. But—"

"But what?"

"Look you, I told you the other day that I was very glad to oblige the Government; in the first place because I esteem it, and secondly because by so doing I harass the nobles and everything connected with them, and I detest them all. But, after all, I should not be sorry, at the same time that I confer a favor upon this government of my heart, to try the weight of its specie; for, thus far, I have always contributed to it, and have never received anything from it. Besides, what makes you think that when they once have their hands on her for whom they promise us mountains of gold, they will give us what they have promised us,—what they have promised you, I should say?"

"You're a fool!"

"No, but I should be a fool if I did n't say to you what I am saying. I am very fond of taking sureties,—the oftener the better; and if I am to speak frankly, I must say that in this matter I don't see much security as yet."

"You run the same risks that I do. I have had, from one high in authority, the promise that a hundred thousand francs shall be counted out to me, if I do what I have undertaken to do."

"A hundred thousand francs! a hundred thousand francs! That's very little for you to come such a long distance. Come, confess that it's two hundred thousand, and that you are only giving me the fourth of it, because I am working at home, so to speak, and haven't to put myself out. *Peste!* two hundred thousand francs! You're in luck; it's a good round sum, and sounds well. All right, trust to the Government if you choose, but have you any right to ask me to trust you? Who is to assure me that you won't make off with the cash, since you are to have the handling of it? And if that does happen, from what tribunal shall I seek redress, I ask you?"

"My dear sir, when one enters into a political partnership, the signing of the contract is always taken on faith."

"Is that the reason why political contracts are so well kept? Frankly, I prefer a different kind of signature."

"Whose do you want, pray?"

"Either your own or that of the minister you're negotiating with."

"Well, I will try to satisfy you."

"Hush!"

"What is it?"

"Did n't you hear anything?"

"Yes, somebody's coming; seems to me I hear wagon wheels."

The two men rose together, and by the rays of the moon, which was shining brilliantly, Jean Oullier, who had not lost a word of what they said, could distinguish their features.

One of them was a perfect stranger to him; but in the other he recognized Courtin, whose voice had already betrayed him, however, as well as his talk of the She-wolves.

"Let's get out of the way," said the stranger.

"No," replied Courtin, "I still have a number of things to say. Let us hide here in the bushes till the fellow passes, and then finish up our business."

They both made for the bushes. Jean Oullier realized that he was lost; but as he did n't wish to be taken like a rabbit in his hole, he rose to his knees and drew from his belt a hunting-knife, with a broken point, but still capable of doing some execution in a hand-to-hand fight.

He had no other weapon, and thought the two men were unarmed.

But Courtin, seeing a man rise in the bushes, and hearing the tearing of the thorns and briers, stepped back a foot or two, without taking his eyes from the ghostly apparition, picked up his gun which was lying beside the fallen tree, loaded one of the barrels and fired.

A stifled cry followed the report.

"What have you done?" asked the stranger, who thought Courtin inclined to be a little hasty in his action.

"Look, look!" replied the farmer, trembling like a leaf, "there was a man spying on us!"

The stranger ran to the thicket, and put aside the branches.

"Look out! look out!" called Courtin; "if it's a Chouan, and he is n't stone dead, he'll have a shot at you."

Courtin, as he spoke, kept aloof, with his second barrel loaded and ready to fire.

"It's a peasant, sure," said the stranger; "but I think he's dead."

He thereupon seized Jean Oullier by the arm and pulled him out of the ditch.

Courtin, seeing that he lay like a log on the ground, ventured to approach.

"Jean Oullier!" he cried, as he recognized the old man; "Jean Oullier! Upon my soul I hardly thought that I should ever kill a man; but the devil take me! if it had to be, it's much better that it should be this man than another. This is what might be called a lucky shot, believe me."

"But meanwhile," said the stranger, "the wagon is getting nearer."

"Yes, it's got to the top of the hill, and the horse is trotting. Come, come, there's no time to lose. We must use our legs. Is he really dead?"

"To all appearance."

"Well, then, off we go!"

The stranger let go his hold of Jean, and his head fell against the ground, with a dull, heavy thud.

"Faith, he's dead and no mistake," said Courtin.

"Look you," he continued, pointing at the corpse, but afraid to go near it, "there's something which assures us our reward, better than all the signatures in the world. That corpse is worth all of two hundred thousand francs."

"How so?"

"He was the only man who could take away from me

the bloodhound I spoke to you about. I thought he was dead before, but I was wrong. Now that I am sure he's dead,— to the hunt! to the hunt! ”

“ Yes, for here's the wagon.”

In truth it was not more than a hundred yards away; the two men darted into the fields and disappeared in the darkness, while the widow Picaut, on her way to fetch Jean Oullier as she had promised, and startled by the report she had heard, hurried upon the stage of the scene we have just described.

CHAPTER XIX.

MASTER COURTIN'S BATTERIES.

A FEW weeks had sufficed to bring about a complete change in the existence of the various individuals who have been introduced to the reader since the beginning of this narrative.

The state of siege was declared in the four departments of La Vendée; the commanding-general issued a proclamation, wherein he called upon the country-folk to submit, promising to treat them indulgently. The attempt at rebellion had failed so wretchedly that the majority of Vendéans had no hope for the future. Some of them, who were compromised, decided to follow the advice which their leaders themselves gave them when disbanding them, and to lay down their arms. But the civil authority declined to accept the capitulation; they were arrested, and a considerable number of the most confiding cast into prison. This impolitic severity paralyzed the pacific disposition of those who had shown more prudence by waiting.

Master Jacques was indebted to this state of things for a large increase in the numbers of his band; he took advantage so cleverly of the conduct of his adversaries that he succeeded in collecting a sufficient number of men to maintain his strongholds in the forests when La Vendée was disarming.

Gaspard, Louis Renaud, Bras-d'Acier, and the other leaders, had put the salt water between themselves and

the harsh measures of the Government; but the Marquis de Souday had not been able to bring himself to it. Since he had left Petit-Pierre, or rather since Petit-Pierre had left him, the unfortunate gentleman had completely lost the jovial humor with which he had combated the melancholy of his companions up to the last moment, from a keen sense of honor; but as soon as his duty ceased to make gayety imperative, he fell into the opposite extreme, and became gloomy to the point of death. The reverse at Chêne not only dealt a blow at his political sympathies; it overturned from the very foundation the castles in Spain which he had taken such pleasure in building. He could see thenceforth, in the partisan's life, of which his fancy formerly evoked nought but picturesque memories, only things of which he had never dreamed,—such as defeats which overwhelmed him, and the wretched obscurity and trivial, annoying privations, which make up the whole life of a proscribed and hunted man.

The same marquis, who used so recently to complain of the dulness of his life at the little Château de Souday, found himself now bitterly regretting the pleasant evenings, lightened by the loving attentions and the prattle of Bertha and Mary. Especially did he miss his conversations with Jean Oullier; and he was so unhappy at being parted from him that he made inquiries as to his fate with a degree of solicitude which he very seldom exhibited.

It was with his mind thus disposed that he happened upon Master Jacques, sauntering about in the neighborhood of Grand-Lieu, to keep an eye on the actions of a flying column.

The marquis had never felt very much in sympathy with the master of the Rabbits, whose first act was to

deny his authority; the independent spirit demonstrated by Master Jacques had always seemed to him a fatally bad example for the Vendéans. Jacques, for his part, detested the marquis, as he detested all those whom their birth or social position naturally placed above him; he was deeply touched, nevertheless, by the wretched plight in which he found the old gentleman, in the hut where he had sought shelter the day after Petit-Pierre's departure for Nantes, and he offered to secrete him in Touvois forest, where, in addition to the abundance which reigned in his little camp, and which he proposed to share with him, the marquis might look forward to the pleasure of exchanging a few thumps with the soldiers of Louis Philippe.

It goes without saying that the marquis spoke of the king as *Philippe* simply.

The last consideration was the one which decided M. de Souday to accept Master Jacques' offer. He burned to be revenged for the death of his hopes, and to make some one pay for his lost illusions, for the *ennui* due to his separation from his daughters, and for his disgust at the disappearance of Jean Oullier. So he followed the master of the Rabbits, who was thus transformed from subordinate (or insubordinate) to patron, and who was so touched by the simplicity and kind-heartedness of the old man that he showed much more regard for him than his rough exterior and his antecedents gave promise of.

Let us now return for a moment to Bertha. As soon as she had begun to recover her strength, a day or two after Courtin took her and Michel to his house, it occurred to her that her presence under the same roof with her beloved without her father and without Jean Oullier, who might have taken his place at a pinch, was at least

of doubtful propriety, and, notwithstanding Michel's wounded condition, might be interpreted in a way disastrous to her reputation; so she left the farmhouse and took up her abode with Rosine in the Tinguu cottage. There she was scarcely an eighth of a league from Michel, and she went to see him every day, and lavished upon him the thoughtful care of a sister, accompanied by all the fond attentions of a lover.

The fondness and the self-sacrificing devotion of which Bertha gave him so many proofs affected Michel deeply; but as they worked no change in his attachment to Mary, their only effect was to make his situation ever harder and harder. He did not dare to think of bringing despair into the heart of the maiden to whom he owed his life. However, a sort of mild resignation gradually took the place of the violent and bitter feelings of the first days; and without being reconciled to the idea of the sacrifice Mary demanded of him, he responded by smiles which he tried hard to render affectionate, to Bertha's incessant attentions; and when she left him, the long-drawn sigh which escaped him, and which Bertha took to herself, was the only sign of his regret. Had it not been for Courtin, who invariably climbed the stairs leading to Michel's closet as soon as Bertha had disappeared behind the trees in the garden, and who then took his turn beside the invalid's pillow and talked to him of Mary,—had it not been for him, the loving, impressionable heart of Michel might eventually have submitted to the necessities of the situation, and accepted what seemed the decree of fate; but the mayor of La Logerie talked to him so much about Mary, and expressed such a sincere wish to see his heart's desire gratified, that Michel found the wound in his heart re-opening, and his gratitude to Bertha vanishing before the memory of her

sister, in proportion as the wound on his arm healed up, and he recovered his health.

Courtin performed a task similar to Penelope's: he undid at night what Bertha, with much labor, did during the day.

The mayor had little difficulty, in Michel's weak state when he was carried to his house, in obtaining his master's forgiveness for his conduct toward him, by attributing it to his attachment to him and the anxiety his flight had caused him. That done, and having, as we have heard him say, easily surprised Michel's secret, he finally succeeded, by dint of protestations of devotion, and skilfully fanning his passion for Mary, in recovering his confidence completely. Michel suffered as much from not being able to give vent to the suffering of his heart, as from the suffering itself; Courtin seemed so sympathetic, he flattered his fancies so cleverly, and expressed such profound admiration for Mary, that he gradually induced Michel to give him a chance to guess, if he did not actually confide to him, what had taken place between the sisters and himself.

Courtin was very careful not to assume a hostile attitude to Bertha's face; he managed matters so adroitly that she believed him to be heartily in accord with the project which contemplated her union with his young master. In Michel's absence he invariably addressed her as his future mistress. In short, he played his part so well that she, being moreover entirely ignorant of his antecedents, was forever speaking to Michel of his farmer's devotion, and always referred to him as "our good Courtin."

But as soon as he was alone with Michel, he entered at once into his most secret thoughts and feelings. He pitied him; and Michel, under the influence of that

pity, naturally yielded to his desire to talk of his woes, and told him all the details of his acquaintance with Mary. Courtin always drew the same conclusion,—“she loves you.” He insinuated that it was Michel’s duty to exert a gentle pressure upon Mary’s heart, for which she would inevitably be grateful to him; he anticipated his desires, and swore that as soon as his health was restored and existing obstacles to communication were removed, he would devote his whole time to bringing Michel’s happiness to pass; and he promised to arrange matters so that he would be able to induce Bertha voluntarily to renounce her cherished project, without falling short in the gratitude he owed her.

Michel’s convalescence did not progress nearly fast enough to keep pace with the wishes of Courtin, who was profoundly disturbed to see so many days pass without being able to find out anything as to Petit-Pierre’s whereabouts, and was impatiently awaiting the time when he could start his young master on Mary’s trail.

The reader, we trust, has divined ere this that Michel was the hound he had spoken of using.

Bertha, relieved from anxiety on account of the baron’s wound, had made, with Rosine for her companion, several excursions to Touvois forest, where the marquis had sent word to her that he was in hiding. Two or three times, on her return, Courtin had turned the conversation upon the persons in whom the two girls might be supposed to be most deeply interested; but he could get nothing out of Bertha, and he realized too well how dangerous the ground was, and how easily any imprudence on his part might re-awaken sleeping suspicions, to lay much stress on the question. But as Michel’s health improved steadily, as soon as he was alone with him, he urged him to come to some decision, and hinted to him that if he

chose to intrust him with a letter for Mary, he would undertake, in the first place, to induce her to reply to it; and, in the second place, to argue her out of her first determination.

Things remained in this condition for six weeks, at the end of which time Michel was vastly better. His wound was healed, and his strength almost wholly restored.

The proximity of the military post established by the general at La Logerie prevented him from showing himself in the day-time; but when night came, he walked back and forth under the trees in the orchard, leaning on Bertha's arm.

When the hour for parting arrived, Michel would go up to his little hole, and Rosine and Bertha, whom the sentries had become accustomed to see going back and forth at all hours, would return to the Tinguy cottage, whence Bertha would return to Michel's side after breakfast the next day.

These evening walks annoyed Courtin, who was always hopeful of capturing on the wing some of the information he was after, when the interviews between Michel and Bertha took place inside the house; so he did all that he could to prevent them. And it was with the purpose of putting an end to them that he adopted the plan of imparting to them every evening the list of condemnations published in the gazettes which he received in his capacity of mayor.

One day he informed them that they absolutely must abandon their nocturnal promenades; and when they asked him the reason, he read them the judgment by default against Michel de la Logerie, whereby he was condemned to death.

This information produced but a very slight effect

upon Michel, but Bertha was terrified; for an instant she thought of throwing herself at his feet, and imploring his pardon for having involved him in such a wretched business, and when she left the farmhouse that evening she was in a state of intense agitation.

The next day she was with Michel very early in the morning.

All night she had had fearful dreams, all the more fearful because she had dreamed them with her eyes open.

She saw Michel discovered, arrested, shot!

Two hours earlier than usual she was at the farm.

Nothing new had happened; there seemed nothing more to be apprehended on that day than any other.

The day passed as usual,—filled with joy mingled with agony for Bertha; filled with sadness and vague hope for Michel.

Evening came; a beautiful summer evening.

Bertha was leaning against the little window looking upon the orchard; she was watching the sun go down behind the great trees of Machecoul forest, whose leafy tops were waving like a sea of verdure.

Michel was sitting on his bed, breathing in the sweet odors of the evening when they both heard a carriage rolling along the avenue.

The young man rushed to the window. Both saw a *calèche* driving into the yard; Courtin ran up, hat in hand, and a head appeared at the window of the *calèche*; it was the head of the Baronne Michel.

The young man, at the sight of his mother, felt a shudder pass through all his limbs.

It was evident that she had come in quest of him.

Bertha questioned him with her eyes to know what she should do.

Michel pointed to a dark recess, a sort of closet without a door, where she could hide, and hear everything without being seen. Her unseen presence would be a source of strength to him.

Michel was not mistaken; five minutes later he heard the boards of the staircase creaking beneath the baronne's steps.

Bertha ran to her corner, and Michel sat down by the window as if he had neither seen nor heard anything.

The door opened and the baronne came in.

It may be that she had come with the purpose of being rough and harsh as usual; but as she looked at Michel in the waning light, and saw that he was as pale as the light itself, she forgot all her harsh resolutions, and could do nothing but hold out her arms to him and cry, —

“Oh, my poor boy, there you are at last!”

Michel, who was not expecting such a greeting, was deeply moved by it, and threw himself into the baronne's arms crying, —

“Mother! my dear mother!”

For she too was greatly changed; her face plainly showed the twofold trace of incessant weeping and sleepless nights.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEREIN MADAME LA BARONNE, WHILE ARRANGING MATTERS FOR HER SON, DOES THE SAME FOR PETIT-PIERRE.

THE baronne sat down, or rather fell into an easy-chair, drew her son down upon his knees before her, and taking his head in her hands, pressed her lips upon his brow.

After a long struggle, her power of speech seemed to return.

"What!" said she, "do I find you here, within a hundred yards of the château which is filled with soldiers?"

"The nearer I am to them, mother," said Michel, "the less chance is there of their looking for me where I am."

"But don't you know what's been going on at Nantes?"

"What has been going on there?"

"Why, the military tribunals are pronouncing decree after decree."

"That only concerns those who are in custody," laughed Michel.

"It does concern everybody," his mother replied; "for those who haven't been taken may be any moment."

"Nonsense! not when they are in hiding at the house of a worthy mayor of well-known Philippist opinions."

"Nevertheless, you are —"

The baronne stopped as if her mouth refused to continue.

"Go on, mother."

"Nevertheless, you are sentenced."

"To death; I know that."

"What! you know that, wretched boy, and you can talk so calmly about it?"

"I tell you, mother, that as long as I am at Courtin's house, I shall not think of fearing anything."

"Is the man well disposed to you, then?"

"He's nothing more nor less than a sort of supplementary Providence. He found me wounded, and dying of starvation; he brought me here, to his house, and has fed me and hidden me ever since."

"I confess that I was prejudiced against him."

"Well, you were wrong, mother."

"All right. Now let's talk about our affairs, dear boy. Well hidden as you may be, you can't stay here."

"Why not?"

"Because it would require only the very slightest imprudence or indiscretion to ruin you."

Michel made a gesture of doubt.

"You don't want me to die of fright, do you?" said his mother.

"No, and I am waiting to hear what you have to say."

"Well, I shall die of fright unless you leave France."

"Have you considered the difficulties in the way of flight, mother?"

"Yes, and I have got over them all."

"How so?"

"I have chartered a little Dutch vessel, which is waiting for you, at this moment, in the river opposite Couéron. Go aboard of her, and leave the country,—

that is, if you are strong enough to bear the journey, *mon Dieu!* ”

Michel made no reply.

“ You will go to England, won't you? You will leave this accursed land which has already drunk your father's blood? So long as I know that you are in France, you see, I shall not have a peaceful moment. Every instant I seem to see the executioner putting out his hand to tear you from my arms! ”

Still Michel said nothing.

“ Here, ” continued the baronne, “ is a letter which will serve as your credentials with the captain. Here's a letter of credit for fifty thousand francs to your order on England and America. Wherever you go, write me, and I will send you as much more as you wish. Or better than that, my child, my dear child, wherever you may be, I will come and join you. But what's the matter, pray, that you make no reply? ”

In truth, Michel did receive this communication with a degree of insensibility bordering upon stupor. To leave the country meant to be separated from Mary; and there was a moment when, at the thought of that separation, his heart was so oppressed that he felt as if he would prefer to defy the death-sentence which had been pronounced upon him. Since Courtin had revived his passion and had caused him to form fresh hopes, he dreamed night and day of possible methods of reconciliation with her, but without saying anything to Courtin on the subject. He could not bear the thought of giving it all up again; and instead of replying to his mother, he became, as she developed her plan, all the more determined to marry Mary.

Hence his silence, which, not unnaturally, disturbed the baronne.

"Mother," said he, "I do not answer you because I find it impossible to answer you as I would like."

"What! As you would like?"

"Listen, mother," said the youth, with a firmness of which she would not have believed him capable, and which perhaps would have amazed himself at another time.

"You won't refuse to go away, I hope?"

"I don't refuse to go," said Michel; "but I will only go on certain conditions."

"You talk about conditions when your life and safety are at stake! You make conditions about putting an end to your mother's anguish!"

"Mother," said Michel, "since we last saw each other, I have suffered much, and consequently have learned much. Especially I have learned that there are certain moments when the happiness or despair of a whole life are at stake. Now, this is one of those moments for me, mother."

"And you propose to condemn me to despair, do you?"

"No; I am going to speak to you man-fashion, that's all. Don't be surprised. I was cast into the midst of exciting events a mere child, and I have come out a man. I know my obligations to my mother. They are respect, affection, gratitude; and I shall never be false to them. But in passing from youth to manhood, mother, there are hitherto undreamed-of horizons which come in view and widen as one ascends; and it is in connection with these that obligations await one which, taking the place of those of youth, bind one no longer exclusively to the family, but to society at large. When one reaches this point, though the cheek be still held to the mother, the hand will be held

out to another woman, who will be, in time, the mother of his children."

"Aha!" exclaimed the baronne, drawing away from her son, with an instinctive movement which she could not restrain.

"Well, mother," the baron rejoined, rising as he spoke, "I have already held out my hand, and another hand has replied to it. The two are indissolubly bound together. If I leave the country, I will not go alone."

"You will go with your mistress?"

"With my wife, mother."

"Do you imagine that I will give my consent to this marriage?"

"You are at liberty to withhold it, mother; but I, too, am at liberty to refuse to go away."

"Oh, wretched, wretched boy!" cried the baronne. "This, then, is my reward for twenty years of loving care and devotion!"

"Your reward, mother," said Michel, with a firmness which was made easier for him by the knowledge that not one of his words was lost upon the ear which was listening, "you must find in my respect for you and in the devotion of which I will give you abundant proof when occasion offers. But real maternal love does n't demand usurious interest. It does n't say, 'I will be your mother twenty years, so that I may then become your tyrant!' It does n't say, 'I will give you life, youth, strength, intelligence, so that all these qualities may blindly obey my maternal will.' No, mother, true maternal love says, 'When you were weak, I sustained you; when you were ignorant, I taught you; when you were blind, I led you. Now you can see, you have knowledge, you are strong. Live your life not according to my caprice, but according to your will. Choose

one of the thousand paths which lie before you; but wherever it leads you, love, cherish, and revere forever the one who brought you from weakness to strength, from ignorance to knowledge, from blindness to sight.' That is my understanding of the mother's power over her son, and of the respect which the son owes his mother."

The baronne was struck dumb. She would have been less surprised at the destruction of the planetary system than at this firm and thoughtful language.

She looked at her son with a stupefied stare.

Very proud and well-pleased with his own performance, Michel returned her gaze calmly, and with a smile on his lips.

"I am to understand, then, that nothing will induce you to think better of this madness?" she asked.

"In other words, mother," retorted Michel, "nothing will induce me to break my word."

"Oh," cried the baronne, covering her eyes with her hands, "unhappy mother that I am! "

Michel knelt again at her feet.

"But I say, 'What a happy mother you will be the day that you make your son happy!'"

"Pray, what is there so fascinating about these Wolves?" cried the baronne.

"By whatever name you choose to call the woman I love," said Michel, "I will reply, 'She, to whom my heart is given, has all the qualities which a man ought to look for in a wife; and it is not for us, mother, who have suffered so much from the tongue of slander, to accept so willingly, as you do, the calumnies with which others are assailed.'"

"No, no, no," exclaimed the baronne, "I will never consent to this marriage!"

"In that case, mother," said Michel, "take back these letters of credit and the letter to the captain of the 'Jeune Charles.' They 're of no sort of use to me."

"What do you propose to do, unhappy boy?"

"Oh, its very simple, mother. I should rather die than live apart from the woman I love. I am entirely cured; I feel quite strong enough to carry a musket. The remnants of the insurrection, under the command of the Marquis de Souday, are in Touvois forest; I am going to join them, fight with them, and get killed at the first opportunity. Twice death has missed me," he added, with a wan smile; "the third time it will have a surer eye and a steadier hand."

As he spoke, he let the papers fall on his mother's lap.

There was so much resolution and firm determination in the tones of his voice that his mother saw that it was useless for her to hope to change him.

Her own strength gave way before her conviction of that fact.

"Let it be as you wish, then," said she; "and may God forget how you have overborne your mother's wishes!"

"God will forget it, mother, never fear; and when you see your daughter, you will forget it yourself."

The baronne shook her head.

"Oh," said she, "go and get married, far away from me, to a stranger whom I don't know and never saw!"

"I shall marry, I hope, a woman whom you will have come to know and appreciate, mother; and that great day will be made sacred by your blessing. You offered to join me wherever I am. I shall expect you there, mother, wherever it may be."

The baronne rose, and walked a few steps toward the door.

"Are you going away without saying good-by, without kissing me, mother! Are n't you afraid that will bring me bad luck?"

"Come, then, unhappy boy,—come to my arms, to my heart!"

She uttered these words with the cry which comes always, sooner or later, from a mother's heart.

Michel pressed her fondly to his breast.

"When will you go, my child?" she asked.

"That will depend on her, mother."

"Let it be as soon as possible, won't you?"

"To-night, I hope."

"You will find a complete peasant's costume downstairs. Disguise yourself as well as you can. It is eight leagues from here to Couéron; you can be there at five in the morning. Don't forget, the 'Jeune Charles.'"

"Don't worry, mother. From the moment that I am sure that happiness is at the end of my journey, I shall take all necessary precautions to reach it in safety."

"Meanwhile I will return to Paris, and exert whatever influence I can command to procure a reversal of your sentence. Do you, once more I beg you, be careful of your life; and try to remember that in so doing you are making mine of more value to me."

Mother and son exchanged another kiss, and Michel went to the door with her.

Courtin, like the faithful servant he was, was waiting at the foot of the stairs, and Madame de la Logerie begged him to go with her to the château.

When Michel, having closed the door, turned back into the room, he saw Bertha with a happy smile upon her lips, and love beaming from her eyes. She was awaiting the moment when she should be alone with him, to throw herself into his arms.

Michel received her there; but if the little room had not been quite dark, the embarrassed expression which his features assumed would probably not have escaped Bertha's notice.

"So nothing can ever separate us now, my dear," said she. "We have all we need, — my father's consent and your mother's."

Michel said nothing.

"We leave to-night, do we not?"

Michel received Bertha's question in silence, as he did his mother's.

"Well, dear, why don't you answer?" she inquired.

"Because nothing is less sure, as yet, than our departure," said Michel.

"Why, didn't you promise your mother to go to-night?"

"I said to my mother, 'That will depend on *her*.'"

"Well, by 'her' you meant me, didn't you?"

"What!" exclaimed Michel; "you, Bertha, devoted Royalist that you are, leave France thus, without thinking of those whom you leave behind?"

"What do you mean?" Bertha asked.

"I mean that I am dreaming of something grander and more useful than my own liberty or my own safety," replied Michel.

Bertha looked at him, in wonder.

"I have in mind the liberty and safety of Madame," he added.

Bertha began to understand.

"Ah!" she exclaimed.

"Why can't this boat my mother chartered for me," said Michel, "take on board with us, and carry away from France, the princesse, your father, and your sister?" he added, in a lower tone.

"Oh, Michel! Michel!" cried the girl; "forgive me for not thinking of that! A moment ago I loved you, now I admire you! Yes, yes, you are right; it was Providence that put the thought in your mother's brain. Yes, now I forget all the harsh and cruel things she said about me. I see in her only an instrument of God, sent to our assistance to save us all. Oh, my dear, how good you are! Even better than you are great, for having thought of it all!"

Michel stammered a few unintelligible words.

"Oh, I knew," Bertha continued, enthusiastically, "that you were the bravest and most loyal heart in the world; but to-day, Michel, you have risen above my fondest hopes. Poor boy! Wounded, condemned to death, he still thinks about others' interests before his own! Oh, my dear, I was happy before; now I am proud of my love."

At this apostrophe, if the room had been lighted, Bertha would have seen a burning blush take the place of embarrassment on Michel's face. Indeed, the young fellow's devotion was not so disinterested as Bertha fancied.

After he had, in a measure, forced his mother to consent to his marriage with the woman of his choice, he had dreamed of taking advantage of the opportunity to render Petit-Pierre the greatest service she could receive at that moment from her most devoted adherent, and then confessing everything to her, and asking Mary's hand as the reward of his service.

This explains his embarrassment and his blushes in presence of Bertha's enthusiasm. With a manner that was cold, in spite of all he could do, he contented himself with this reply to the young girl's demonstrations of affection:—

"Now that everything is settled, Bertha, we have no time to lose, I think."

"No," said she; "you are right, dear. Give your orders! Now that I recognize the superiority of your mind as well as your heart, I am ready to obey."

"We must part," said Michel.

"Why so?"

"Because you must go to Touvois forest, Bertha, and inform your father of what is going on. From there you and he will go to Bourgneuf bay, where the 'Jeune Charles' will take you up, as she passes. I am off for Nantes, to notify the duchesse."

"You go to Nantes! Do you forget that you are under sentence of death, and that they are hunting for you? I should go to Nantes, and you to Touvois!"

"I am the one expected on board the 'Jeune Charles,' Bertha; probably the captain would not consent to obey any one else. If he were to see a woman instead of a man, he would fear a trap, doubtless, and involve us in endless difficulty."

"But just think of the risk you run in going to Nantes!"

"On the contrary, Bertha, just think if it's not the place where I am in the least possible danger. No one will ever suspect me of venturing to enter the town where I have been sentenced to death. Indeed, there are times, you know, when the height of audacity is the height of prudence; and this is one of those times. Let me go."

"I told you that I would obey you, Michel, and I will."

And the beautiful, high-spirited girl awaited with the meekness of a child the orders of a man who, by virtue of his apparent self-sacrificing devotion, had assumed gigantic proportions in her eyes.

Nothing could have been simpler than the plan agreed upon, and its manner of execution. Bertha gave Michel the address of the duchesse, at Nantes, and confided to him the various countersigns and passwords which would enable him to reach her. Dressed in Rosine's clothes, she was then to seek her father in Touvois forest; while Michel, in the peasant's suit brought by Madame de la Logerie, was to make the best of his way to Nantes.

If nothing happened to interfere with their plans, the "Jeune Charles" could set sail at five the next morning, and carry away, with Petit-Pierre, the last embers of the civil war.

Ten minutes later, Michel bestrode Courtin's nag, saddled and bridled by himself; and with a last wave of the hand, took leave of Bertha, who returned to the Tinguy cottage, and thence immediately betook herself, by cross-cuts, to Touvois forest.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARCHES AND COUNTER-MARCHES.

NOTWITHSTANDING the luxury of wind-galls and spavins with which old age and hard work had supplied Master Courtin's steed, the gallant beast still retained sufficient energy in the amble, which took the place of a trot in his case, to land Michel at Nantes before nine in the evening.

His first stopping-place was to be the Point du Jour inn: and as soon as he had crossed the Pont Rousseau, he began to look out for said inn.

Having spied its sign-board, whereon was represented a star, casting a ray of the finest yellow ochre the painter had at his disposal, he stopped his nag—we should say, Master Courtin's nag—before a wooden trough, which was intended to furnish refreshment for the horses of wagoners who stopped to bait without unharnessing.

No one was to be seen at the door at which Michel stopped. So, forgetting his humble garb and remembering only the alacrity which the servants at La Logerie were accustomed to exhibit at his approach, he struck several impatient blows upon the trough with his riding-stick.

Thereupon a man in his shirt-sleeves came out of the inn-yard and approached Michel. He wore on his head a blue cotton cap, pulled down over his eyes.

Michel imagined that the portion of his face that he could see was not unfamiliar to him.

"The devil!" growled the man in the blue cap. "So you're too much of a gentleman to take your horse to the stable yourself, are you, my young *gars*? In that case we will treat you like a *bourgeois*."

"Treat me as you please," said Michel, "but answer my question."

"Put your question," said the man, folding his arms.

"I would like to see Père Eustache," said Michel, in an undertone.

Low as Michel had spoken, the man made an impatient movement, and looked around suspiciously; and although he saw only a number of children, who were gazing open-mouthed at the young peasant, with their little hands folded behind their backs, he hastily seized the bridle and led the horse into the yard.

"I tell you I would like to see Père Eustache," repeated Michel, alighting from his horse in front of the shed which served the Point du Jour as a stable.

"I hear," replied the man in the blue cap, — "*parbleu!* I hear you; but I haven't got your Père Eustache in my oat-bin. Besides, you must tell me where you come from before I tell you where to find him."

"From the South."

"Where are you going?"

"To Rosay."

"Right! You must pass by Saint Sauveur church; there you will find the man you are looking for. Go; and try not to speak quite so loud, Monsieur de la Logerie, when you are talking in the street, if you want to reach the end of your journey."

"Oho!" exclaimed Michel, somewhat astonished; "so you know me, do you?"

"*Pardieu!* yes," replied the man.

"Then you must send the horse back to my house."

"It shall be done."

Michel put a louis in the hand of the ostler, who seemed delighted with such a wind-fall, and was profuse in tendering his services; then he boldly entered the town. When he reached Saint Sauveur church, the sacristan was just closing the doors. The lesson the man at the inn had given Michel bore fruit, and he determined to wait and examine carefully before questioning anybody.

Five or six beggars, before leaving the porch where they had passed the day, asking alms from the faithful, were kneeling while saying their evening prayers.

Père Eustache was doubtless among them. His principal duty was to offer the consecrated water in a sprinkler; but it was hard to recognize him, because, besides two or three women enveloped in their bright-colored Indian mantles, there were three beggars, each one of whom held a sprinkler in his hand. Any one of the three therefore might be Michel's man.

Luckily the young baron had another means of picking him out. He took the sprig of holly which Bertha had fastened in his hat as being the sign which would designate him to Père Eustache, and let it fall in front of the door.

Two of the beggars kicked it without taking the slightest notice of it.

The third, who was a dried-up, slim little old fellow, with a nose of immoderate size, which protruded boldly from beneath a black silk cap, started as he spied the green leaves on the flag-stones, picked up the branch of holly, and looked uneasily around.

Michel came out from behind the pillar where he was hidden; and Père Eustache (for he it was) glanced in

his direction. Then, without a word, he walked toward the cloister.

Michel understood that the sprig of holly was not enough to satisfy the suspicious dispenser of holy water; so after he had followed him a few steps, he accosted him with, —

“ I come from the South.”

The beggar started.

“ And where are you going ? ” he asked.

“ I am going to Rosay,” was the reply.

The beggar thereupon began to retrace his steps. With a significant glance out of the corner of his eye, he indicated to Michel that they understood one another; then he started off into the town, and Michel followed five or six steps behind him.

They passed the church door again, and walked through a part of the town; just as they were entering a dark, narrow street, the beggar stopped a second in front of a low door cut in a garden-wall.

When he started again, Michel was going to follow on behind him, but the beggar made a sign intended to inform him that the little gate was his destination; there he disappeared in the darkness.

Michel saw that he had slipped the holly into the iron ring which served as a knocker.

He raised the ring and let it fall against the door, whereupon a little wicket opened, and a man's voice asked him what he wanted.

Michel repeated the countersign, and was shown into a room on the ground-floor of a house, where a gentleman whom he recognized as one of those he saw at the Château de Souday the night that General Dermoncourt ate Petit-Pierre's supper, and whom he saw again, gun in hand, the night before the battle of Chêne, was tran-

quilly reading his newspaper, sitting in front of a roaring fire in his dressing-gown, with his feet on the andirons.

Despite his extremely peaceful occupation, however, this gentleman had a pair of pistols within easy reach of his hand on a table whereon were pens, ink, and paper also.

He at once recognized Michel, and rose to welcome him.

"I think I saw you in our ranks, monsieur," he said.

"Yes, monsieur," Michel replied; "the night before the battle of Chêne."

"And the next day?" the man in the dressing-gown asked with a smile.

"The next day I was at La Pénissière, where I was wounded."

The stranger bowed.

"Would you do me the honor to tell me your name?" he asked.

Michel complied; the gentleman consulted a memorandum-book which he took from his breast, made a sign of satisfaction, and turned again to the baron.

"Now, monsieur," he inquired, "what brings you here?"

"The desire to see Petit-Pierre, and do him a great service."

"Pardon, monsieur, but you cannot reach the person you mention, in that way. You are one of us; I know that we can rely upon you; but you see that frequent going in and out of the house which has kept its secret so well thus far, would soon attract the attention of the police. So pray be good enough to intrust your plan to me, and I will give you the reply you desire."

Michel thereupon detailed his conversation with his mother; how she had made sure of a vessel to take him

out of reach of the sentence pronounced against him, and how he had conceived the idea of using that vessel to secure the safety of Petit-Pierre.

The man in the dressing-gown listened with increasing interest; and when the baron had finished, he said:

"Upon my word, it is Providence that has sent you! It is utterly impossible, no matter how great precautions we use, — and you can judge how great they are, — that the house where Petit-Pierre is concealed will long elude the watchful eye of the police. For the good of the cause, for Petit-Pierre's own interest and ours, it is better that she should go; and the difficulty of finding a ship being so happily overcome, I will at once go to her, and receive her commands."

"Shall I follow you?" asked Michel.

"No; your disguise beside my *bourgeois* coat would attract the notice of the spies by whom we are surrounded. At what inn did you put up?"

"At the Point du Jour."

"You are at Joseph Picaut's, then; there's nothing to fear there."

"Ah," Michel exclaimed, "I knew his face was familiar; but as I thought that he lived between the Boulogne and Machecoul forest —"

"You were right; he's only an inn-keeper for the time-being. Go and wait for me there; in two hours I will come, alone or with Petit-Pierre, — alone if he refuses to accept your offer; with him if he accepts it."

"Are you quite sure of this Picaut?" queried Michel.

"Oh, yes; as sure of him as of ourselves. If he is open to any reproach, it is that he is too zealous. Remember that, during Petit-Pierre's wanderings in Vendée, more than six hundred peasants have at one time and another known the secret of her different

hiding-places; and it is these poor fellows' greatest honor and glory that not one of them ever dreamed of making his fortune by betraying her. Tell Joseph that you expect some one, and that he must therefore be on the lookout. By saying these words to him, 'Rue du Château, No. 3,' you will receive from him and the other people of the inn the most absolute, passive obedience."

"Have you anything else to tell me?"

"Perhaps it would be prudent for the persons who accompany Petit-Pierre to leave the house where she is hidden separately, and go to the Point du Jour one by one. Take a room with a window looking on the quay; have no light in your room, but leave the window open."

"You won't forget anything?"

"No. Adieu, monsieur,—*au revoir*, rather; and if we succeed in getting aboard your craft, safe and sound, you will have rendered an immense service to the cause. As for myself, I am in a continual state of alarm: they talk of vast sums offered as a reward for treachery, and I tremble lest somebody's cupidity be aroused at last, and ruin us all."

Michel was shown out of the house, not by the door by which he entered, but by one in the other side, opening on another street.

He hurried through the streets to the quay. At the Point du Jour he found Joseph Picaud, who had hunted up a street Arab, and was giving him instructions about taking Courtin's horse home, as Michel had requested.

The baron, as he entered the stable, made a sign to the pseudo-ostler, which he perfectly understood, and sent the boy away, postponing his errand till the following day.

"You told me that you knew me," said Michel, when they were alone.

"I did better than that, Monsieur de la Logerie, for I called you by name."

"Very well, I'm not sorry to learn that we are quits in that respect. I know your name, too; you are Joseph Picaut."

"I don't deny it," said the peasant, with his sly expression.

"Are you to be trusted, Joseph?"

"That's according to who asks anything of me; Blues or Reds, no; Whites, yes."

"You are White, then?"

Picaut shrugged his shoulders.

"If I was n't, should I be here, when I am sentenced to death, as you are yourself? It's like this: they did me the honor of declaring me in default. Oh, we are exactly equal before the law."

"So! then here you are —"

"Ostler, nothing else."

"Take me to the landlord."

The landlord, who had gone to bed, was aroused. He received Michel with some distrust; so he, realizing that there was no time to waste, decided to fire his big gun first, and said, —

"Rue du Château, No. 3."

No sooner did mine host hear the countersign than his distrust vanished, and he became an altogether different man; from that moment he and his house were at Michel's disposal.

"Have you any travellers in the house?" Michel asked.

"Only one," was the reply.

"Of what sort?"

"The very worst. He's a man we must keep an eye on."

"You know him then?"

"He's the mayor of La Logerie, Master Courtin,—a miserable dog of a patriot!"

"Courtin!" cried Michel, "Courtin here! Are you sure?"

"I did n't know him; Picaut told me."

"When did he come?"

"Barely quarter of an hour ago."

"Where is he?"

"He's out just now. He ate a morsel, and then went right out, informing me that he should not return till very late,—about two in the morning; he had business at Nantes, he said."

"Does he know that you know him?"

"I don't think it, unless he recognized Joseph Picaut, as Joseph did him; but I doubt if he did, for he was in the light, while Picaut stood in the shadow all the time."

Michel thought for a moment.

"I don't think Master Courtin is quite so bad as you imagine," he said. "But no matter, we must keep an eye on him, as you say; and it's especially important that he should not know of my presence here."

Picaut, who had stood outside the door thus far, now came forward and joined in the conversation.

"Oh," said he, "if he annoys you too much, we must just tell him so! I'll fix it so that he won't know anything, or so that he'll hold his tongue if he finds out anything. I have an old grudge against him, and for a long time I have been simply looking for an excuse—"

"No, no!" cried Michel, quickly, "Courtin is my tenant; I am under some obligations to him, and don't want any harm to come to him; besides," he hastened to add, as Picaut frowned darkly, "he isn't what you take him for."

Picaut shook his head, but Michel failed to observe the gesture.

"Don't be alarmed," said the landlord; "if he comes back, I'll keep an eye on him."

"All right! now, Joseph, do you take the horse I was riding; it's as well that Master Courtin should n't find him here. He would surely recognize him, as he belongs to him."

"Very well!"

"You know the river, don't you?"

"There isn't a foot of the left bank that I'm not familiar with; I'm not so sure about the right."

"If that's the case it's all right, for it's the left bank that's in question."

"Tell me what I'm to do."

"You are to go to Couéron: abreast of the second island you will see a vessel lying,—the 'Jeune Charles.' Although at anchor, she will have her fore-top-gallant sail set; you can recognize her by that."

"Never fear."

"You will take a skiff and go aboard of her; her hail will be, '*Qui vive?*' you will reply, '*Belle-Isle-en-mer.*' Then they will throw you a line, and take you aboard; you must hand the captain this handkerchief in just this condition,—that is, with three knots in it,—and tell him to be ready to make sail at one in the morning."

"Is that all?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes — I mean no, it's not all; if I am content with you, Picaut, you shall have five pieces more to match the one I gave you this evening."

"Well, well," said Picaut, "aside from the chance of being hung, this isn't so bad a job I've got here after all; and if I could only get a shot at the Blues now and then, or revenge myself on Courtin, on my word, I

would not regret Master Jacques and his rabbit-holes. And afterwards?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when I have executed my commission?"

"You will hide on the bank and wait for us; we will notify you by a whistle. If all is well, you will reply by imitating the call of the cuckoo; if, on the other hand, you have seen anything to disarrange our plans, you must warn us with the hoot of an owl."

"*Peste!*" exclaimed Joseph, "it's easy to see that you've been studying at a good school, Monsieur de la Logerie. It's all very clear, and seems to me to be well thought out. Faith! it's an infernal shame that you haven't a better horse to put between my legs; in that case, your business might be attended to quickly and well." •

Picaut left the room to perform his allotted task, while the inn-keeper conducted Michel to a first-floor room of poor appearance, which was used as an annex to the dining-room, and had two windows on the road; then he posted himself where he could watch for Courtin.

Michel opened one of the windows, as he had agreed with the gentleman in the dressing-gown; then he took a seat in such a position that he could command a view of the road without showing his head.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEREIN MICHEL'S LOVE AFFAIR SEEMS TO HAVE
TAKEN A TURN FOR THE BETTER.

MICHEL though apparently motionless, was in a state of extreme and agonizing excitement. He was to see Mary again; and at that thought his heart swelled and his blood leaped madly in his veins. He felt himself trembling with emotion. He had no clear idea what the end of it all was to be; but the firm attitude he had, contrary to his wont, maintained in the presence of his mother and Bertha, had succeeded so well, that he had made up his mind to be no less firm with Mary. He realized fully that he had arrived at the supreme crisis, and that everlasting happiness or irreparable woe was to be the consequence of her decision.

He had been there nearly an hour, following anxiously with his eyes all the human forms which seemed to be approaching the little inn, watching their every movement to see if they were not really coming toward the door, in despair when he saw his ever-renewing hope vanish once more, finding every minute an eternity, and asking himself if his heart would not break when he should be actually face to face with Mary.

Suddenly he saw a dark form coming from the direction of Rue du Château, walking swiftly and noiselessly on tiptoe, and keeping close to the houses. By the clothes he saw that it was a woman, but of course it was neither Petit-Pierre or Mary; it was not probable that either of them would come alone.

However, the young baron fancied that she scanned the house with increasing intentness as she approached; then he saw her stop in front of the inn, and heard three little knocks upon the door.

Michel made but one leap from his post of observation to the stairway; he rushed down, opened the door, and recognized Mary in the cloak-enveloped figure before him.

Their respective names were all that the lovers could say, thus suddenly brought face to face. Michel seized her arm and led her through the darkness, into the room on the first floor.

But they were no sooner inside the door than he fell on his knees at her feet.

"Oh, Mary, Mary," he cried, "it is really you! It seems still as if I must be dreaming. So many times I have thought about this blessed moment, so many times I have anticipated in my imagination this sweet bliss, that it is hard for me now to conceive that I am not still the plaything of a dream. Mary, my angel, my life, my love, oh, let me hold you to my heart!"

"Oh, Michel, my friend," said Mary, sighing at her inability to control the emotion which was taking possession of her, "I, too, am very happy to see you again. But tell me, my poor dear boy — you have been wounded?"

"Yes, yes; but it was not my wound which made me unhappy; it was my separation from all on earth that I love. Oh, Mary, believe me, death is very deaf and cruel, for it refused to come in response to my prayer."

"Michel, how can you talk so, my friend? How can you forget all that poor Bertha has done for you? We knew all about it; and I have admired her so, my poor sister, and loved her so dearly for her devotion, of which she was giving you such abundant proof every moment."

But at the mention of Bertha's name, Michel, fully determined not to allow Mary to impose her wishes upon him, rose abruptly, and began to pace up and down the room, with a quick, nervous step which sufficiently betrayed his excitement.

Mary saw what was passing in the young man's heart; she made a final effort.

"Michel," said she, "I implore you, I beg you in the name of all the tears I have shed at thought of you, not to speak to me any more except as to your sister. Not to forget that you are soon to be my brother."

"Your brother! I, Mary?" exclaimed Michel, shaking his head emphatically. "Oh, as to that, my mind is made up irrevocably; never, never, I swear!"

"Michel, Michel, do you forget that you took a different oath from that?"

"I never took that oath! No, you forced it from me, — cruelly forced it from me; you took an unfair advantage of my love for you, to make me give you up! But everything in me rises in revolt against that oath; not a fibre of my body wishes that it should be kept. And here I am, Mary,— here I am, saying to you, 'I have been parted from you two months, and for two months I have thought only of you! I was near death, buried beneath the burning ruins of La Pénissière, and I thought only of you! I was near being killed (the bullet which ploughed through my shoulder, had it struck a little lower and a little more to the right, would have pierced my heart), and I thought only of you! I was near dying of hunger, weakness, and weariness, and I thought only of you! Bertha is my sister, Mary; you, you are my well-beloved, my darling betrothed; you, Mary, shall be my wife.'"

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* what are you saying, Michel? Have you gone mad?"

"I was mad for a moment, Mary,— when I imagined that it would be possible for me to obey you; but absence, grief, despair, and pain have made another man of me. Don't base your calculations any longer upon a weak reed which bends beneath your breath. Whatever you do, you shall be mine, Mary! — because I love you, because you love me, because I refuse to lie any longer to God and my heart."

"You forget, Michel," Mary replied, "that my resolutions don't change from moment to moment as yours do. I have sworn; and I will keep my oath."

"So be it; but in that case I have left Bertha forever; Bertha will never see me again."

"My friend —"

"Come now, Mary, tell me seriously, why do you suppose I am here?"

"You are here, my friend, to rescue the princesse to whom we are all devoted, body and soul."

"I am here, Mary, to see you. Don't give my devotion to the princesse any more credit than it deserves. I am devoted to you, and to nobody else. What inspired the thought of saving Petit-Pierre? My love! Should I ever have dreamed of it if it had not given me the opportunity to see you again? Don't make a hero or a demigod of me; I am only a man, but a man who loves you madly, and who will risk his head for you. But leaving you out of the question, tell me, pray, how all these dynastic quarrels concern me? What have I to do with the Bourbons of the elder branch, or the Bourbons of the younger branch,— I, who seek no place in the pages of history, and who am bound by no sacred memory to the past? You are my opinion; you are my belief! If you had been for Louis Philippe, I should have been for Louis Philippe; you are for Henri V.,

so I am for Henri V. Ask me for my blood, and I will say to you, 'Here it is!' but do not ask me to lend myself any longer to the continuance of an impossible situation."

"Pray, what do you mean to do?"

"Tell Bertha the truth."

"The truth? Oh, you won't dare!"

"Mary, I vow —"

"No, no."

"Oh, yes, yes! Every day, Mary, do you see, I shake myself freer from the swaddling-clothes of my youth. It's a far cry, believe me, from me, as I am now, to the baby you met one day on a back-road, wounded, and weeping with fear at the name and remembrance of my mother. My new-found strength is due to my love. I have endured, without lowering my eyes, a look which, in the old days, would have made me bend my head, and would have broken my two knees. I told my mother everything, and she said to me, 'I see that you are a man; do as you will!' Now, this is what I will: to devote myself absolutely to you. But I want you to do as much for me. Thus you see what an insane struggle you have undertaken. I, Bertha's husband! Let us imagine it for an instant: why, there could be no suffering to equal hers, poor creature, unless it was my own. My infancy was made bright by tales of the 'republican marriages,' so-called, where Carrier, of bloody memory, bound together a living and dead body and threw them into the Loire together. That, Mary, is what a union between Bertha and myself would amount to; and would you, Mary, looking on at our agony, be any happier than we? Tell me! No, I am determined; either I will never see Bertha again, or the first time I do see her, I will tell her how Petit-Pierre

was led astray by my crazy timidity, and how I lacked courage to tell her the truth while it was still time. In short—in short, I will not tell her that I love her, but that I love you.”

“*Mon Dieu!*” cried Mary, “why, do you know that if you do that, Michel, she will die?”

“No; Bertha will not die,” said the voice of Petit-Pierre, who had come up behind them unobserved.

The young people turned around with a cry.

“Bertha,” Petit-Pierre continued, “is a noble, true-hearted girl, who will comprehend what you say to her, Monsieur de la Logerie, and will take her turn at sacrificing her happiness to the happiness of those who are dear to her. But you will not have the task to perform; the fault was mine,—the error rather,—and I will repair it, taking this occasion, however,” she added with a smile, “to beg Monsieur Michel to be more explicit in his confidences another time.”

At the first word Petit-Pierre uttered, Michel and Mary hastily moved away from one another with a little cry of alarm.

But she took an arm of each, brought them together again, and joined their hands.

“Love each other without remorse,” she said; “you have both been more generous than one has a right to expect of poor human kind. Love each other without stint, for happy are they whose ambition ends there.”

Mary lowered her eyes; but as she did so, she returned the pressure of Michel’s hand.

The young man kneeled before the little peasant.

“I shall need,” said he, “all the happiness you bid me hope for, in order not to regret my failure to lay down my life in your service.”

“Why do you talk about laying down your life?

Why do you talk about death at all? Alas! I can see clearly now, that nothing is of less use than to lay down one's life, that nothing is of less use than to die! Take my poor Bonneville! What good did his devotion do me? No, Monsieur de la Logerie, you must live for those whom you love; and you have given me the right to take my place among them. Live then for Mary, and for her part—let me answer for her—Mary will live for you."

"Ah, madame," cried Michel, "if all Frenchmen could see you as I have seen you, if they knew you as I know you —"

"Yes, I should have a chance to take my revenge one day or another, especially if they were all in love. But let us change the subject, please, and think about retreating before we begin to dream of another attack. Just look and see if our friends are coming, for I owe you a rebuke; Mademoiselle Mary had absorbed your attention so completely, my gallant sentinel, that I should have had to wait in the street till morning for the signal agreed upon. Fortunately I heard your voices; fortunately, too, you had taken the precaution to leave the street door open."

While Petit-Pierre was thus rebuking Michel, jokingly, the two persons who were to accompany her in her flight, arrived; but after a brief discussion, they agreed that her safety would be compromised if so many of them went together, so they gave up the idea of following her.

Petit-Pierre, Michel, and Mary therefore set out alone.

The quay was deserted, the Pont Rousseau seemed absolutely so. Michel went ahead as scout.

They crossed the bridge without hindrance.

Michel started along the bank; Mary and Petit-Pierre followed him, walking side by side.

It was a superb, bright night, — so bright that they were afraid to walk thus in the open, and Michel suggested that they should take the Pèlerin road, which runs parallel to the river, and is less bare of trees than the bank. His suggestion was adopted, and they followed the road, in the same order of march as before.

From time to time, they caught a glimpse of the river lying in the moonlight, a broad shining sheet of silver, dotted here and there with tree-covered islands which stood out clearly against the silvery background of the river as the trees stood out against the sky.

The splendor of the night, although it had its drawbacks, was not without compensating advantages. Michel, acting as guide, was more certain of not going astray, and he would be able, also, to see the vessel at a greater distance.

When they had passed, or skirted, the village of Pèlerin, the baron concealed Mary and Petit-Pierre in a hole in the bank, went down to the stream, and whistled as a signal to Picaut.

As he received no reply, Michel, who had been somewhat anxious up to that time, began to feel easier; from the Chouan's silence, he felt confident that he would soon join him.

He waited five minutes; nothing stirred.

He whistled a second time, louder and more piercing than before.

There was no reply, and no one appeared.

He thought he might have made a mistake as to the rendezvous, and ran along the shore.

In two hundred steps he passed the island of Couéron, and left the village of that name behind him.

There was no other island behind which the vessel could be lying, and yet he could not discover her.

It must be, then, that the place for him to wait was between the villages of Couéron and Pèlerin, where he had first stopped, and the vessel must be lying behind the island there; but unless some accident had happened, he could not account for Joseph Picaut's failure to appear.

Then an idea occurred to him.

He feared that the vastness of the sum promised to any one who should deliver to the authorities the person whose identity was hidden under the name of Petit-Pierre, might have tempted the Chouan, whose face had not prepossessed Michel in his favor. He communicated his apprehension to Petit-Pierre and Mary, who had joined him.

But Petit-Pierre shook her head.

"It is n't possible," said she; "if the man were going to betray us, we should have been arrested before this. Besides, that would n't explain the absence of the vessel."

"You are right. The captain was to send a small boat ashore, and I don't see it."

"Perhaps it is n't time yet."

At that moment the village-clock of Pèlerin struck twice, as if deputed to answer the objection.

"There's two o'clock striking now," said Michel.

"Was any time agreed upon with the captain?"

"My mother could only say what was probable; and she suggested five o'clock to him."

"He would hardly have got restless, then; for we're on hand three hours earlier than he expects us."

"What shall we do?" asked Michel. "My sense of responsibility is so great that I don't dare to rely upon myself."

"We must take a boat," said Petit-Pierre, "and try

to find the vessel. Perhaps when the captain found out that we knew his anchorage, he left it to us to find him."

Michel walked toward Pèlerin, and spied a skiff moored to the bank. It had been in recent use, for the oars lying on the bottom were still wet.

He went back and told his companions, and suggested that they return to their hiding-place while he crossed the river.

"But do you know how to manage a boat?" Petit-Pierre asked him.

"I confess," replied Michel, blushing for his ignorance, "that I am not a past master."

"Then we'll go with you," said Petit-Pierre, "and I will be pilot. Many a time I have filled that position for fun, in the bay of Naples."

"And I will help row," said Mary. "My sister and I have often pulled across the lake of Grand-Lieu."

They embarked,—all three. When they were half-way across the Loire, Petit-Pierre, who was sitting at the stern and gazing intently down stream, leaned forward, crying out,—

"There she is! there she is!"

"Who? where?" asked Mary and Michel together.

"The vessel! the vessel! Look! look there!"

She was pointing, as she spoke, down the river, toward Paimbœuf.

"No," said Michel; "that can't be it."

"Why not?"

"Because, instead of coming this way, she's going away from us."

At the moment, they were passing the end of the island. Michel leaped ashore, helped his companions to do likewise, and rushed to the other end, without a second's delay.

"It's our vessel, sure!" he cried, hurrying back to Petit-Pierre and Mary. "To the boat! to the boat! We must row our hardest."

They all jumped aboard again. Mary and Michel seized the oars, and pulled with all their strength, while Petit-Pierre held the tiller, as before.

Aided by the current, the little boat made good progress. There was a chance of their overtaking the schooner, if she kept on as she was going.

But suddenly a square black object hid from their sight the lines thrown upon the sky by the rigging and mast; they were hoisting their mainsail. It was soon followed by another piece of canvas which fell into place above it, — the main topsail, — which in turn was followed by the jib.

The "Jeune Charles" was setting all sail, to take advantage of the breeze that was springing up.

Michel took the second oar from Mary's feeble hands, and bent to the work, like a convict in the galleys. He was in despair; for, in a second, he had reckoned up the possible consequences of the schooner's departure.

He wanted to shout to hail her; but Petit-Pierre, through prudence, ordered him not to do it.

"Bah!" said she, with a fund of gayety which outlasted all the vicissitudes of fortune, "it's very evident that Providence does n't choose that I shall leave this fair land of France."

"True!" cried Michel, "if Providence has anything to do with it."

"What do you mean?"

"That I'm afraid there's some infernal scheming behind all this."

"Nonsense, my poor fellow; it's only chance. Somebody made a mistake as to the day or the hour, that's

all; besides, who can say that we should have escaped the cruisers which are prowling about the mouth of the Loire? Perhaps it's all for the best."

But Michel was not convinced by Petit-Pierre's reasoning. He continued to lament, and wanted to jump into the Loire and swim to the schooner, which was gliding smoothly away and beginning to pass out of sight in the mist which lay along the horizon. It was only with much difficulty that Petit-Pierre succeeded in restoring his tranquillity somewhat.

She might not have succeeded at all, had she not employed Mary to that end.

At last Michel dropped the oars, discouraged. Three o'clock was just striking at Couéron, and in an hour day would begin to break.

There was no time to lose. Michel and Mary resumed the oars; they pulled ashore, and left the boat very near the spot where they had found it.

They concluded, perforce, to return to Nantes; and it was important to get there before dawn.

On the way, Michel struck his forehead impatiently.

"Oh," said he, "I've made a fool of myself, I'm afraid!"

"How?" the duchesse asked him.

"By not going back to Nantes on the other shore."

"Pshaw! all roads are good enough when one travels with circumspection. And what should we have done with the boat?"

"Left it over there."

"And the poor fisherman it belongs to would have to waste a day hunting for it. Oh, no; it's much better for us to have a little more trouble than to take a piece of bread out of the mouths of those poor fellows, who have none too much of it, perhaps."

They reached the Pont Rousseau. Petit-Pierre insisted that Michel should let Mary and herself enter the town by themselves; but he would not consent. Perhaps he was too happy walking by Mary, who, reassured by what Petit-Pierre had said, still sighed now and then; but even while sighing, replied in kind to the fond expressions of her lover, — perhaps, we say, he was too happy by her side to be reconciled to leaving her so quickly.

All that he could be induced to consent to was, that he should walk a short distance behind, instead of walking ahead or abreast of them.

They had crossed the Place du Bouffai, and Michel was just turning the corner into Rue Saint Sauveur when he thought he heard steps behind him. He turned quickly, and saw, by the dim light of a street-lamp, a man some hundred yards in the rear. When the man saw that he was detected, he darted into the recess of a door.

Michel's first impulse was to chase him; but he reflected that meanwhile Petit-Pierre and Mary would leave him behind, and he would not know where to find them.

So he ran ahead and overtook them.

"Some one is following us," he said to Petit-Pierre.

"Let them follow," she replied, with her customary serenity; "we have a way of throwing them off the scent."

She drew Michel into a cross-street. And after following it for a hundred yards, they came out at the end of the lane which Michel had already made the acquaintance of; and he recognized the door on which the beggar had hung the sprig of holly.

Petit-Pierre raised the hammer and struck three blows, at unequal intervals.

At the signal the door opened, as if by magic. Petit-Pierre pushed Mary inside, and went in herself.

"So far, so good," said Michel. "Now, I am going to see if that man is still spying on us."

"No, no, indeed! You are under sentence of death," said Petit-Pierre. "Even if you forget it, I don't; and as we are running the same risk, we will, if you please, take the same precautions. So come in; come in quickly!"

Meanwhile the same man who had received Michel the night before appeared on the stoop, clad in the same dressing-gown, and not more than half-awake.

He lifted his hands to heaven as he saw Petit-Pierre.

"It's all right! it's all right!" said she; "we've no time to waste in lamenting. The whole thing miscarried, and we are followed. Open, my dear Pascal."

He pointed as she spoke to the half-open door behind him.

"No, not the house-door," said Petit-Pierre, "the garden-gate. In ten minutes the house will probably be surrounded. We must take to the old hiding-place."

"Follow me, then, in God's name."

"We will, my poor Pascal, regretting beyond measure that we had to disturb you so early in the morning, and still more sorry to have made it necessary for you to change your place of abode, if you don't want to be taken."

The garden-gate was opened; and before passing through, Michel put out his hand to take Mary's.

Petit-Pierre saw the movement, and pushed her into the young man's arms.

"Come, embrace him," said she; "or at least let him embrace you. Before me, it's perfectly proper. I take

the place of a mother to you; and in my opinion, the poor fellow has well earned the embrace. There! Now do you go your way, while we go ours. Anxiety about my own affairs will not make me neglect yours, never fear."

"But can't I see her again?" Michel ventured timidly to ask.

"It's very hazardous, I know; but pshaw! they say there's a God who watches over lovers and drunkards, and I'll rely on him. You can pay one visit at Rue du Château, No. 3; but only one, for I propose to arrange so as to hand your fair friend over to you."

As she spoke, Petit-Pierre gave Michel her hand, which he kissed with the utmost respect. Then she and Mary made for the upper town, while Michel retraced his steps toward the Pont Rousseau.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PROVES THAT THERE ARE FISHERMEN AND
FISHERMEN.

MASTER COURTIN was very unhappy all that evening, which Madame de la Logerie compelled him to pass with her.

With his ear glued to the door, he had heard the whole conversation between mother and son; and consequently knew all about the schooner.

Michel's departure would derange all the schemes he had been nursing so long; and so, with little appreciation of the honor the baronne was doing him, he would have been glad to return at once to the farm. He counted upon inducing his young master, at least, to delay his flight by reminding him of Mary; for when he was once gone, we must remember, he, Courtin, would have lost the thread, by the aid of which he calculated upon penetrating the mysterious labyrinth where Petit-Pierre was hidden. Unluckily, when they reached the château, Madame de la Logerie entered upon an entirely different subject. Her only idea in taking Courtin away was to conceal from him her son's departure and to relieve Michel from the farmer's questioning and espionage. But she found her house, which had been for several weeks given over to the tender mercies of a party of soldiers, in such frightful confusion that she laid aside for the moment, in the presence of the sad state of affairs, which assumed in her

eyes the proportions of a veritable catastrophe, her first ideas as to the mayor's untrustworthiness. But she was only the more persistent in keeping him with her, to make of him the echo of her lamentations.

It was her despair, expressed with straightforward emphasis, which prevented Courtin from leaving her, under any pretext, in order that he might return and find out what was happening at the farm.

He was too shrewd not to detect the baronne's original purpose in taking him with her; but she seemed so sincere in her despair at the sight of her broken crockery, shattered mirrors, greasy carpets, and her parlor transformed into a guard-house and adorned with drawings, primitive in execution, but of very startling design, that he finally began to doubt whether his first suspicion was correct, and ended by making up his mind that his young master had not been made to distrust him, and that he could easily overtake him before he got aboard the vessel.

It was nine in the evening when the baronne entered her carriage, after shedding a last tear for the desecration of the manor-house of La Logerie. And the words, "To Paris!" were hardly out of Courtin's mouth before he had left the carriage and started off at a run toward the farm, without listening to his mistress's parting suggestions through the window.

He found that the birds had flown, and learned from his servant that they had left the house nearly two hours before, and had gone in the direction of Nantes.

At first, Courtin thought of overtaking them, and rushed to the stable to saddle his horse; but lo! he was not to be found. In his haste he had not acquired full information from his servant as to the means of locomotion his young master had adopted.

His remembrance of his steed's moderate gait comforted Master Courtin somewhat; but he only stayed at the house long enough to procure some money and, above all, the proofs of his tenure of the office of mayor. Then he set out bravely, on foot, on the trail of the man whom he looked upon as a fugitive and, in some sense, as the purloiner of a certain hundred thousand francs which, in his imagination, he saw fading out of sight upon the person of the lover of the She-wolves.

He ran along, then, like a man who sees his banknotes blown away by the wind, — that is to say, he travelled almost as fast as the wind; but his rapid gait in no wise prevented his making inquiries of every soul he met.

At all times the mayor of La Logerie was essentially inquisitive, and we can understand that on this occasion he did not spare his questions.

At Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu, he learned that his nag had been seen about half-past seven. He asked who was riding him, but he could get no satisfaction on that point, — the attention of the wine-shop keeper, who gave him this information, having been entirely absorbed by the animal's obstinate refusal to pass by the branch of holly and the sign of the apples in the form of a cross, to which Master Courtin was in the habit of paying tribute on his way to Nantes.

A little farther on, the farmer was more fortunate. They described the horseman to him so accurately that he had no doubt it was the baron, although they declared that he was alone.

The mayor, being a cautious man himself, supposed that the young people had separated from motives of caution, meaning to reach the same point by different roads. Luck was with him, since it put them in his

hands one at a time. If he could overtake Michel before he got to Nantes, the battle was won.

He continued, then, in the belief that the baron had not deviated from his road; and he was so sure that he had gone to Nantes, or would soon arrive there, that when he reached the Point du Jour he did not take the trouble to ask the landlord for information which, in any event, he was likely to refuse. So he hastily ate a mouthful; and instead of going into the town, where it would have been impossible to find Michel, he recrossed the Pont Rousseau and turned to the right, toward Pèlerin.

Master Courtin had his plan all thought out.

We have remarked the hopes which he based upon Michel, who, being Mary's lover, would, he felt sure, some day or other intrust to him, with a selfish object, the secret of the hiding-place of his beloved; and as his beloved was with Petit-Pierre, the latter's secret would be betrayed with Mary's.

Now, if Michel were to leave France, he would take Courtin's hopes away with him. Therefore it was essential at any cost to prevent Michel's departure; and if he failed to find the "Jeune Charles" at the rendezvous, he must needs stay.

As for Madame de la Logerie, she was at that time on her way to Paris; and some little time must necessarily elapse before she could be notified that her son's flight had not taken place, and arrange some other way for him to leave La Vendée. That delay would be sufficient for Michel, now entirely restored to health, to furnish the crafty farmer with the means of attaining his cherished purpose.

The only difficulty was that Courtin was still in the dark as to the method he was to adopt to get round the

captain of the "Jeune Charles;" but without suspecting that in that point he resembled a great man of ancient times, Master Courtin trusted to luck for that, and luck did not fail him.

When he was abreast of Couéron, he saw the masts of the schooner towering up among the tops of the trees on the island. The top-gallant sail was flying in the wind, showing that it was the vessel he was looking for.

As he cast his eye along the bank, Courtin saw, some ten yards away, a long bamboo pole held out horizontally over the water, and supplied with a line at the end and a cork which was floating about on the surface.

The pole seemed to come out of a little hillock; but although nothing else could be seen, it implied that an arm was holding it, and that there was somewhere a fisherman to whom the arm belonged.

Courtin was not the man to remain in doubt.

He went straight to the hillock, walked around it, and discovered a man squatting in a depression in the bank, and absorbed in contemplating the evolutions performed by his bit of cork at the bidding of the current.

The man was dressed as a sailor, — that is to say, he wore tarry canvas trousers and a red shirt. On his head was a sort of Scotch cap.

Two steps away a small boat was drawn up on the sand, her stern rocking gently to and fro in the water.

The fisherman, when he heard Courtin coming, did not raise his head, although the farmer took the precaution to cough, to announce his presence and to serve as a prologue to the conversation on which he desired to enter.

Not only did the fisherman maintain a dogged silence; he would not even turn around.

"It's rather late for fishing," the mayor at last observed.

"It's easy to see that you know nothing about it," replied the angler, with a sneer. "To my mind, on the contrary, it's too early; fish that are worth the taking travel around only at night. One can't catch anything but small trash at any other time."

"True; but it will soon be so dark that you can't see your cork."

"What does that matter?" replied the angler, shrugging his shoulders. "I have my night-eyes here," he added, pointing to the palm of his hand.

"I understand. You mean that you can tell by the feeling when the fish has hold of your bait," said Courtin, sitting down beside him. "I'm very fond of fishing, too; and believe it or not, I flatter myself that I know a thing or two about it."

"You! About fishing with the line?" exclaimed the amateur, incredulously.

"Oh, no, indeed!" replied Courtin; "I depopulate the streams of La Logerie with the sweep-net and hoop-net."

Courtin put forward this detail as to locality in hopes that the man with the line, whom he took to be some sailor sent ashore by the captain to put Michel aboard, would rise to the fly.

But he did nothing of the kind.

"Oh, well, now," said he, "it's no use for you to brag about your skill in the great art of fishing. I shall never believe it."

"And why not, pray? Do you think you have a monopoly."

"Because you seem to me, my dear sir, to be ignorant of the first principle of the art."

"What principle is that?"

"That when you want to catch fish, you must keep away from four things."

"What are they?"

"Mud, dogs, women, and chatterers; to be sure they might have said only three," he added philosophically, "for women and chatterers are all one."

"Pshaw! you'll soon find that my chattering isn't so unseasonable after all, when I suggest to you a way to earn a crown."

"If you'll let me catch a half-dozen perch, I shall have earned more than a crown, and had some sport to boot."

"Well, I will go as high as four and even five francs," continued Courtin, "and you will do your neighbor a service at the same time; does that count for nothing?"

"No beating about the bush," said the fisherman; "tell me what you want of me."

"I want you to take me in your boat out to the 'Jeune Charles,' whose rigging you can see from here through the trees."

"The 'Jeune Charles,'" said the tar, with the most innocent expression imaginable; "what's the 'Jeune Charles'?"

"This," said Master Courtin, handing the fisherman a tar-stained hat which he had picked up on the bank, and on which the words **LE JEUNE CHARLES** were printed in gold letters.

"Come, come, my friend, I guess you must be a fisherman after all," said the sailor; "for, deuce take me! you must have eyes in your fingers as I have, to read that in the dark. Well, what do you want of the 'Jeune Charles'?"

"Didn't I say a word just now which caught your notice?"

"My good man," replied the fisherman, "I am like a blooded dog; I don't yelp when I am bitten. Just reel off your log, and don't worry about what's going on aboard of me."

"Well, I am Madame la Baronne de la Logerie's tenant farmer?"

"What then?"

"I come from her," said Courtin, who felt his audacity gradually coming to his assistance, as the skirmishing began.

"What then?" the sailor asked again in the same tone, but with a more noticeable tinge of impatience. "You come from Madame de la Logerie, you say? Well, what message have you from her?"

"I come to tell you that everything has fallen through, that the whole plan is discovered, and that you must clear out as fast as you can."

"*Sufficit!*" replied the fisherman; "but this does n't concern me. I am only the second mate of the 'Jeune Charles;' however, I know enough to grant what you ask, and we will sail in company till we get into the captain's waters, and you can tell your story to him."

As he spoke, the second mate of the "Jeune Charles" calmly rolled his line around the pole and tossed it into the boat, which he then pushed into the water.

Courtin, at a sign from him, took his seat in the sternsheets, while his companion, with a single stroke of the oars, put twenty yards between the bank and himself.

After five minutes they rowed alongside the "Jeune Charles," which being in ballast stood some twelve feet out of water.

The approach of the skiff was greeted by a curiously modulated whistle from the schooner; the fisherman

replied with one almost the same. A figure showed itself at the bow, and threw a line to the new-comers.

The man in the red shirt ran up the vessel's side with the agility of a cat; then he hoisted up Courtin, who was somewhat less accustomed to that particular kind of ladder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

INTERROGATION AND CONFRONTATION.

WHEN to his great delight, the mayor of La Logerie felt the planks of the deck beneath his feet, he found himself face to face with a human form, whose features he could not distinguish, hidden as they were beneath the folds of a thick cotton neckerchief, wound around the collar of his oil-skin reefing jacket; but he judged him to be the captain from the humble and respectful bearing of the deck-hand who had reported their arrival.

"What's this?" said this individual to the fisherman, turning the light of the lantern, without ceremony, on the farmer's face.

"He comes from the one you know of," replied the second mate.

"Go to the devil!" retorted the captain. "What have you ever learned from your hawse-holes, if you think a young man of twenty could be built on a model like that?"

"In truth I am not M. de la Logerie," said Courtin, who had caught the meaning of this nautical jargon. "I am only his tenant-farmer and his confidential man."

"The deuce you say! Well, that's something, but not everything."

"He instructed me —"

"I don't ask you what he instructed you, you infernal land-lubber!" shouted the captain, spitting out on the deck a long jet of black saliva, which impeded

the explosion of his rising indignation; "I tell you that's something, but not everything."

Courtin looked at him with an air of wonder.

"Come, do you understand,—yes or no?" the captain continued. "If no, say so quick, and you shall be set ashore with the honors you deserve,—that is to say, with a good dose of the cat about your ribs."

It then occurred to Courtin that Madame de la Logerie, in all probability, had agreed upon some mark of identification with the master of the "Jeune Charles," and he had no idea what it was. He felt that he was lost; he saw all his plans brought to nought, and all his hopes fly away, to say nothing of being caught like a fox in his own trap, and exhibited to his young master in his true light.

He tried to extricate himself from this predicament, by immediately banishing from his features every trace of anything like intelligence, and affecting the innocent almost idiotic air of the average peasant.

"*Dame!* my dear sir," said he, "this is all I know: My good mistress said to me like this, 'Courtin, my friend, you know that the baron is under sentence of death. I have made arrangements with a worthy sailorman to take him out of France; but here we have apparently been betrayed by some traitor. Run and tell this to the captain of the "Jeune Charles;" you'll find him off Couéron, behind the islands.' So I ran; that's all I know."

At this moment a loud "ohé!" coming from the river ahead of the vessel, startled the captain out of the forcible rejoinder he was probably meditating. He turned to the deck-hand, who, lantern in hand, was listening open-mouthed, to their conversation.

"What are you up to there, *lascar, canaille*, worthless

dog?" he cried, accompanying his words with a pantomimic motion, which, thanks to the rapidity of movement of the young aspirant for the honors of the flag, caught him in a fleshy portion of his anatomy, and sent him rolling into the scuppers.

Then he turned to the second mate.

"Don't let him come alongside unless you know him," said he.

But the words were not out of his mouth, when the new-comer, who had made use of the rope by which Courtin had been hoisted up, and which was still hanging over the side, unexpectedly appeared on the deck.

The captain picked up the lantern which had dropped from the hands of the sailor, but, providentially, was still burning, and walked up to this intruder with it in his hand.

"What right have you to come aboard of me without so much as 'by your leave'?" he cried, seizing the stranger by the collar.

"Because I have business aboard of you," was the reply, given with the assurance of a man who knew the ground he was walking on.

"What do you want? Come, talk up."

"Let alone of me first. You can't be afraid of my running away, when I came of my own accord."

"Why, ten thousand million seals!" exclaimed the captain, "holding you by the collar is n't shutting your mouth."

"I can't talk when my arms are not free," retorted the stranger, without exhibiting the slightest alarm at his interlocutor's manner.

"Captain," said the second mate, intervening in the discussion, "*sacrédié!* in my opinion you are n't fair. You ask the man who's trying to wear ship and get away

for his colors, but you tie knots in this fellow's halyards, when he's trying to hoist his colors."

"You're right," replied the captain, releasing his grip on the new-comer, in whom our readers doubtless have already recognized Michel's accredited envoy, — Joseph Picaut, to wit.

He fumbled in his pocket, produced the handkerchief he had received from the baron, and handed it to the captain of the "Jeune Charles," who unfolded it, and counted the three knots as conscientiously as he would have counted a sum of money.

Courtin, to whom no further attention was paid, had been an observant witness of the scene, and lost no detail.

"Good!" said the captain, "you're all right. We will have a talk together immediately; but, first, I must attend to the case of the gentleman at the stern. — Antoine," he added, addressing his second mate, "take this fellow to the steward's room, and give him a gill of *schnapps*."

The captain went aft again and found Courtin sitting on a coil of rope. He had his head between his hands as if he were utterly oblivious of what had taken place in the bow; he seemed utterly cast down, although, as a matter-of-fact, he had not, as we have said, lost a single word of the conversation between the captain and Picaut.

"Oh, please put me ashore, Monsieur le Capitaine!" he cried, as soon as he saw him coming toward him. "I don't know what the matter is with me, but I've been feeling awfully sick for some time, and I think I'm dying."

"Pshaw! if you're like this for a wretched little tide, you'll have a fine time before you cross the line."

"Cross the line; *Jésus Dieu!*"

"Yes, my good man. Your conversation strikes me as extremely agreeable, and I have decided to keep you aboard during the little voyage I have in prospect."

"Remain here!" cried Courtin, feigning more alarm than he really felt; "and my farm? and my kind mistress?"

"As for your farm, I'll undertake to show you a country where you can study farming on model farms; and as for your kind mistress, I'll agree to replace her satisfactorily."

"But why is this, my good sir? Why this sudden determination to take me off with you? Just consider that my head is turned simply by this bit of a tide, as you said just now!"

"That will teach you to try to fool the captain of the 'Jeune Charles,' you miserable carrot-raiser!"

"Pray, how have I offended you, my good captain?"

"Come," said the skipper, apparently disposed to cut short the interview; "answer honestly. It's your only way to avoid being fed out to the sharks for lunch, a thousand leagues from here. Who sent you to me?"

"Why, Madame de la Logerie, to be sure," cried Courtin. "When I tell you that I am her tenant, and that as true as there is a God in heaven —"

"But, look here," continued the captain, "if Madame de la Logerie sent you, she must have given you something that I could recognize you by, — a note, a letter, a scrap of paper. If you haven't anything, it's because you don't come from her; if you don't come from her, you must be a spy; and if that's the case, beware! As soon as I'm sure of it, I will treat you as spies are generally treated."

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" ejaculated Courtin, more and more despairingly, to all appearance; "I cannot let my-

self be suspected thus. See, here are some letters addressed to me, which I happen to have in my pocket, and which prove that I am Courtin, as I told you; here is my mayor's scarf. *Mon Dieu!* have n't I anything else to convince you that I am telling the truth?"

"Your mayor's scarf!" cried the captain. "Why, how in the devil does it happen, villain, if you're a public functionary, and have taken an oath to the Government, — how does it happen that you're the accomplice of a man who has borne arms against the Government, and is sentenced to death?"

"Eh, my dear sir, because I am very deeply attached to my masters, and my attachment prevails over my strict duty. Indeed, if I must tell you, it was in my capacity of mayor that I learned that you were to be interfered with to-night, and so I told Madame de la Logerie of the danger which threatened. It was then that she said to me, 'Take this handkerchief, and find the captain of the "Jeune Charles."'"

"She said, 'Take this handkerchief'?"

"Yes, she said just that, on my word as a man."

"Well, where is this handkerchief she told you to take?"

"Why, it's in my pocket."

"You imbecile, you idiot, you sodden fool, give it to me, in God's name!"

"Give it to you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I ask nothing better. Here it is."

He drew a handkerchief from his pocket as he spoke.

"Give it to me, give it to me, you stupid dog!" cried the captain, snatching it out of his hands, and assuring himself by a hasty examination that three of the corners were tied in knots.

"Why, you donkey, you brute beast," the captain stormed on, "did n't Madame de la Logerie tell you to give me the handkerchief?"

"Yes," replied Courtin, with an expression which grew more and more idiotic.

"Well, why did n't you give it to me, then?"

"*Dame!*" said Courtin, "because when I came on board, I saw you blow your nose with your fingers; and I said to myself, 'Thank God! if the captain blows his nose with his fingers, he does n't need a handkerchief.'"

"Ah," said the captain, scratching his head, in which a remnant of doubt still lingered, "you are either a very clever rascal, or an infernal idiot. However, as the chances are in favor of the idiot, I prefer to think that that's what you are. Come, now, tell me squarely your reason for coming, and what the person who sent you told you to say to me."

"This is what my kind mistress said, word for word, monsieur —"

"Well, let's hear it."

"'Courtin,' she said, 'I can trust you, can't I?'" "Oh, yes, indeed you can," I replied. "Well, my son, whom you took under your roof, cared for, and concealed in your house at the peril of your life, was to escape to-night, on board the schooner "*Jeune Charles*." But I have learned, indeed you say yourself, that the whole thing is discovered. You have just time to go and tell the good captain not to wait for my son any longer, but to get away as fast as he can; for he is going to be taken to-night for aiding in the escape of a condemned political criminal, and for many other things too.'"

Courtin fired this shot at the end of his carefully prepared explanation, judging from the gallant skipper's physiognomy that he probably had divers other pecca-

dilloes on his conscience besides that particular one which he had in view at the time.

Perhaps his perspicacity did not err, for the worthy tar stood in deep thought for some moments.

"Come, follow me!" he said, at last, to Courtin.

The farmer meekly obeyed, and the captain led him to his own stateroom, and locked him in there.

In a few moments, Courtin, who had been left in darkness and in some uneasiness at the turn affairs were taking, heard steps on the deck approaching the cabin.

The door opened and gave admittance to the captain, who was followed by Joseph Picaut, the second mate with his lantern bringing up the rear.

"Ah, çà!" exclaimed the captain, "now we must come to an understanding once for all. Let's try to untangle this skein of thread which seems badly snarled, or, by the keel of my schooner! I'll score your shoulders with the cat, till the devil himself weeps."

"I have said all I have to say, captain," said Courtin.

Picaut started at the voice; he had not seen the farmer, and was entirely ignorant of his presence on board.

He took a step forward, to make sure that it was he.

"Courtin!" he cried, — "the mayor of La Logerie! Captain, if that man knows our secret, we are lost."

"Who is he, pray?" asked the captain.

"He's a traitor, a spy, a *mouchard*."

"*Morbleu!*" said the captain, "you don't need to tell me that fifty times to make me believe it; the villain has a crafty, hang-dog look about him which I don't fancy at all."

"Indeed," continued Picaut, "you're not half wrong. I tell you he's the damnedest dog of a patriot, and

consequently the meanest skunk in the whole Retz country!"

"What have you to say to that?" the captain demanded. "Come, ten thousand carcasses, answer!"

"Oh, no," said Picaut; "I defy him to make any answer."

Courtin said not a word.

"The devil!" said the captain. "It's pretty clear that we must employ strong measures to make you speak, my villain!"

As he spoke he drew from his breast a little silver whistle hung on a chain of the same metal, and blew a long, shrill blast. At this signal two sailors entered the cabin.

Then a diabolical smile played upon Courtin's lips.

"Good!" said he, "that's just what I've been waiting for before speaking."

He led the captain into a corner, and said a few words in his ear.

"Is that true?" the captain demanded.

"*Dame!*" said Courtin, "it's very easy to ascertain."

"You are right," said the captain, and he made a sign to the second mate and the two sailors who seized Picaut and tore off his coat and shirt.

The captain then went up to him and struck him a smart blow on the shoulder, whereupon the two letters with which the Chouan was branded when he entered the galleys, stood out, as clear as daylight, on his white flesh.

Picaut was attacked by the three men with so much force and suddenness that he could not defend himself. He had no sooner seen what their object was than he made incredible efforts to escape from his captors; but their combined strength was too much for him, and he could only roar and blaspheme.

"Bind him hand and foot," cried the captain, judging the man's moral character by the certificate he bore on his shoulder, "and stow him away in the hold between a couple of casks."

Then he turned to Courtin, who drew a long breath of relief.

"I ask your pardon, my worthy magistrate," said he, "for having hesitated between you and a rogue of that sort; but never fear, I promise you that if your barn is burned down within three years of this, it won't be this fellow that does it."

Without further talk he went on deck again; and Courtin, to his unbounded satisfaction, heard him call all hands to make sail.

Once convinced of the risk he was running, the worthy skipper seemed in such haste to put the greatest possible space between justice and himself, that, asking the mayor's pardon for not offering him a taste of *eau-de-vie*, he put him in a skiff, wishing him a pleasant voyage, and left him free to go ashore wherever he chose.

Master Courtin pulled for the nearest land as hard as he could pull; but notwithstanding his rapid progress, when his keel scraped on the sand, he could see the "Jeune Charles" moving slowly down stream, and shaking out her sails one after another.

He then hid in the same depression in the bank where he had spied the fisherman, and waited.

He had been there but a short half-hour when Michel arrived, and to his great astonishment neither of the two persons who accompanied him was Bertha. He did, however, recognize Mary and Petit-Pierre.

Then he congratulated himself more than ever on his stratagem, so luckily seconded by chance, which had brought Joseph Picaut there as if to contribute to its

success; and he made his preparations to profit by the good luck Heaven sent him.

We need not say that he did not take his eyes off Michel and his companions while they remained on the bank; that he watched every twist and turn of the little boat in which they set out to find the schooner; and that, when they returned to Nantes, he followed them so carefully that not one of the fugitives noticed that they were being spied upon, until Michel, caught sight of him at the corner of the Place du Bouffai. He walked behind the three to the house which they entered.

When they disappeared, he had no doubt that at last he knew Petit-Pierre's lair; he passed the door, pulled a bit of chalk from his pocket, and made a cross on the wall. He was sure that he had his fish in the net, and thought he had only to pull it in, and put out his hand to take his hundred thousand francs.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEREIN WE RENEW OUR ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE GENERAL, AND FIND THAT HE HAS NOT CHANGED.

MASTER COURTIN was intensely excited. When the last of the three persons he had been following all the way from Couéron disappeared behind the little door, he saw again the same vision he had seen on the moor on his return from Aigrefeuille,—the vision which seemed to him the fairest of all visions: he saw a vast pyramid of bits of yellow metal gleaming before his eyes and throwing out golden rays of enchanting brilliancy.

The only difference was that the pyramid this time was twice the size of the first one; for we are bound to admit that Courtin's first, we might say his only thought on finding his prey in the net was, that he would be a monumental idiot if he should admit his Aigrefeuille acquaintance to share in that blessed reward; that he would be a wretched bungler if he could not succeed in carrying the thing through without him.

He determined therefore not to advise him of his progress, in accordance with their agreement, but to go at once to the authorities and lay before them the discovery he had made.

We must, however, do him the justice to say that, amid this luxuriant blossoming of all his fondest hopes, he thought of his young master, whose liberty, perhaps his life, were to be the necessary sacrifice; but he immediately stifled such unseasonable remorse, and started off

at a run toward the prefecture, in order to give his conscience no time to rebel a second time.

He had taken scarcely twenty steps, and was just turning the corner of Rue du Marché, when a man, going as rapidly as he, but in the opposite direction, ran into him and threw him against the wall.

Courtin uttered an exclamation, not of pain, but of surprise, for he recognized M. Michel de la Logerie, whom he supposed to be behind the little green door he had so carefully marked with a white cross.

His amazement was so profound that Michel could not have failed to notice it, if he had not been singularly pre-occupied himself; but he was overjoyed to encounter one whom he considered a friend, and in whom consequently he looked for an ally.

"Tell me, Courtin," he cried, "you just came along Rue du Marché, didn't you?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Baron."

"Did you meet a man who was apparently running away?"

"No, Monsieur le Baron."

"Why, yes, you must have met him!—a man who seemed to be playing the spy on somebody."

Master Courtin blushed to the whites of his eyes, but he soon recovered himself.

"Wait a moment! Yes," he rejoined, concluding to take advantage of this unexpected opportunity to avert all suspicion, "yes, I remember, there was a man in front of me; and I saw him stop in front of that green door we can see from here."

"That's the man!" cried Michel, with no thought except to discover the spy. "Courtin, you can give me now a proof of your fidelity and devotion. It is absolutely necessary that we find that man. Which way did he go?"

"That way, I think," replied Courtin, pointing to the first street his eye fell upon.

"Come, then, follow me!"

Michel started off hastily in the direction indicated by Courtin. But the latter, as he went along behind him, began to consider.

For a moment he contemplated leaving his young master to run where he chose, while he gave him the slip, and kept on whither he had set out to go; but it was only a moment before he congratulated himself that he had not followed his first inspiration.

There were two ways of getting out of the house,—that was very evident to Courtin; and as Michel had noticed that they were being watched, it was certain that the two doors were used to throw spies off the scent. Petit-Pierre, without doubt, had left the house, as Michel had done, by Rue du Marché, at the corner of which he had met the baron.

Now, Michel probably knew the hiding-place of his beloved, and by sticking to Michel the worthy mayor was sure to attain his end, whereas he might spoil everything by too great haste; therefore he resigned himself to the loss of the proceeds of such a successful cast of the net, and to lay in a new store of patience.

He quickened his pace and overtook the young man.

"Monsieur le Baron," said he, "it is my duty to urge you to be more prudent. The day has come, the streets are filling up, and everybody is staring to see you rushing through the town with your clothes all soiled with mud, and drenched with dew. If we meet any police agent, he may very well suspect you, and arrest you; and what would Madame your mother say, who urged me to bring her here to receive her last orders?"

"My mother? Why, at this hour she believes me to be at sea on my way to London."

"What! You were going away?" cried Courtin, with the most innocent air imaginable.

"To be sure! Did n't she tell you?"

"No, Monsieur de la Logerie," replied the farmer, while his features assumed an expression of deep and bitter sorrow. "No! I see very clearly that, in spite of all I have done for you, the baronne is suspicious of me; and it cuts my heart as a plough-share cuts the soil."

"Come, come, you must n't despair, my good Courtin. You see your change of heart was so abrupt, so sudden, that one finds it difficult to explain; even I myself, when I think of the evening you cut my girths, have to ask myself how it can be that you have become so kind and thoughtful and devoted."

"*Dame!* monsieur, it's easy enough to understand, however; then I was fighting for my political opinions, while to-day they are out of danger. I am certain that the government I love will not be overthrown; I no longer see in the She-wolves and the Chouans anything but my master's friends; and it's very hard to find myself so ill rewarded."

"Oh, well," replied Michel, "I propose to give you a striking proof that I appreciate your return to more generous ideas, and confide to you a secret, which you have already guessed. Courtin, it is probable that the future Baronne de la Logerie will not be the young lady whom you have supposed until now."

"You mean that you shall not marry Mademoiselle de Souday?"

"No, indeed; only my wife will be named Mary, instead of Bertha."

"Ah, I shall be very glad for you; for, as you know,

I have done all that I could to that end. And the only reason I haven't done more was that you didn't want me to. Ah, çà! so you have seen Mademoiselle Mary, have you?"

"Yes, I have; and the few moments I passed with her were sufficient, I think, to make my happiness sure," cried Michel, giving free vent to the ecstasy that he felt.

"Must you return to La Logerie to-day?" he asked Courtin.

"Monsieur le Baron must know that I am here only to obey his orders," replied the farmer.

"All right! Then you shall see her yourself,—you shall see her, Courtin; for I am to meet her again this evening."

"Where?"

"Where you met me."

"Indeed! So much the better!" said Courtin, whose face lighted up with an expression of satisfaction equal to that which his young master's features wore at that moment; "so much the better! You can't imagine how pleased I shall be to see you married at last according to the inclination of your heart. Faith! it's quite as well for you to take the one you want as long as your mother is willing. See what good advice I give you!"

And the farmer rubbed his hands like a man whose joy knows no bounds.

"Good Courtin!" exclaimed Michel, much moved by his tenant's sympathetic outburst. "Where shall I find you this evening?"

"Wherever you choose."

"Are n't you stopping at the Point du Jour?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Baron."

"Well, let's pass the day there. This evening you can wait for me while I go after Mary; then I will bring her back with me, and we will all go away together."

"But, you see, I have various errands to do in the town," suggested Courtin, considerably embarrassed by his young master's plan, which disarranged all his schemes.

"I will go with you everywhere; it will help me to kill the time, which will most certainly seem very long from now till evening."

"You mustn't think of such a thing! My duties as mayor oblige me to go to the offices of the prefecture, and you can't go there with me. No, go back to the inn and get some rest; then we will start at ten o'clock to-night,—you very joyous in all probability, and I very happy, too, perhaps."

Courtin's object was to get rid of Michel for the time being; for some time the thought that he might earn all by himself the reward promised to the man who should betray Petit-Pierre had been simmering in his brain, and he was determined not to leave Nantes without knowing the facts as to the amount of the reward, and as to the chance of his being able to avoid sharing it with anybody.

Michel realized the force of the reasons Courtin suggested; and casting a glance upon his mud-stained clothes, which were besides all saturated with the heavy dew, he decided to part from him, and return to the inn.

As soon as his young master had left him, Courtin hurried to General Dermoncourt's headquarters; he gave his name to the sentry, and after waiting a few moments, was ushered into the presence of the man he sought.

The general was pretty thoroughly disgusted with the

turn affairs had taken. He had forwarded to Paris a plan of pacification, drawn on the lines of those which had succeeded so well under General Hoche; it was not approved. He saw the civil authority encroaching on all sides upon the powers which the state of siege devolved upon the military authorities, and his old soldier's sensitiveness, as well as the blow to his patriotic feelings, made him thoroughly dissatisfied.

"What do you want?" he said sharply to Courtin, eying him from head to foot.

Courtin bowed almost to the ground.

"My general," said he, "do you remember Montaigu fair?"

"*Parbleu!* as if it had been yesterday, and especially the night which followed it! Ah, my expedition came very near succeeding that night; and if it had n't been for a rascal of a game-keeper who bribed one of my chas-seurs, I would have choked out the insurrection at its birth. By the way, what was that fellow's name?"

"Jean Oullier," replied Courtin.

"What's become of him in all this last trouble?"

Courtin could not prevent himself from turning white.

"He is dead," said he.

"That's the best thing for him, poor devil! and yet it's too bad; he was a fine fellow."

"If you remember the man who made the affair mis-carry, general, how comes it that you have forgotten the man who furnished you with your information?"

The general looked closely at Courtin.

"Because Jean Oullier was a soldier, — that is to say, a comrade, — and one never forgets such; while one does forget the others, — spies and traitors that is, — as soon as possible."

"Very good!" said Courtin. "In that case, general, I

will venture to assist your memory, and to inform you that I am the man who disclosed Petit-Pierre's whereabouts to you."

"Indeed! Well, what do you want now? Speak, and be brief."

"I want to render you precisely the same service over again."

"Oh, yes; but times are changed, my man! We are not now in the by-roads of the Retz country, where one remarks a little foot, a white skin, and a sweet voice, on account of the scarcity of such articles in the neighborhood. Here, everybody looks more or less like a great lady; therefore, within a month, more than twenty blackguards of your stamp have come to sell us the skin of the bear. Our soldiers are tired out with ransacking five or six quarters, and the bear is not yet captured."

"General, I have the right to have you put faith in my information, for I have already proved to you once that what I say can be depended on."

"'Pon my word," said the general, in an undertone, "it would be a pretty good joke if I should find all by myself what this gentleman from Paris, with his whole outfit of *mouchards*, spies and ruffians, and high and low police, has not yet succeeded in bringing to light. Are you sure of what you have to tell me?"

"I am sure that within twenty-four hours I shall know what you want to know, the street and number."

"Come to me then."

"But, general, I would like —" He checked himself.

"What?" asked the general.

"A reward has been talked of, and I should be glad —"

"Oh, yes;" said the general, turning upon Courtin, and gazing at him with an expression of the utmost contempt.

"I had forgotten that, although a public functionary, you are one of those who never neglect their private interests."

"*Dame!* general, you said yourself that you forget us as soon as you can."

"And the money you receive takes the place of the public gratitude; indeed, it's logical. Thus, you do not give, you sell and haggle. You are a dealer in human flesh and blood, my worthy farmer; and to-day being market-day, you have come to market like the rest, and with the rest."

"You have said it! Oh, don't be put out, general; business is business, and I'm not ashamed to look carefully after mine."

"Very well; but I am not the one for you to apply to. A gentleman specially detailed to manage this affair has been sent from Paris; when you have your prey in hand, you must find him, and turn it over to him."

"That's what I will do, my general. But," continued Courtin, "as I gave you accurate information the first time, are n't you inclined to reward me for it?"

"My goodman, if you think that I owe you anything, I am ready to settle. Come, say what it is; I am listening."

"It will be the easier for you, as what I ask does n't amount to much."

"Say it, say it!"

"Tell me the size of the reward to be given to the man who puts Petit-Pierre into their hands."

"A matter of fifty thousand francs, I believe. I'm not interested in that."

"Fifty thousand francs!" cried Courtin, recoiling as if he had received a mortal blow. "Why, fifty thousand francs is n't worth looking at!"

•

"You are right; and in my judgment, it's not worth while to make one's self infamous for such a paltry sum. But you must say that to those whom it concerns. As far as we are concerned we're quits, aren't we? If so, relieve me of your presence. Adieu!"

The general thereupon resumed the work he had interrupted to receive Courtin, and seemed to take no interest whatever in the humble courtesies to which the mayor resorted to beat a dignified retreat.

He went out in a less jubilant frame of mind than that in which he had entered. He had no doubt that the general knew perfectly well the correct figures of the sum fixed for blood-money; and he could not reconcile what he had heard from him with what the Aigre-feuille party had told him, except on the theory that the latter was himself the person sent down from Paris by the Government. He definitely gave over all idea of acting without him; and while promising himself to make sure of his security, he resolved to inform him of what had taken place at the earliest possible moment.

Thitherto the man had always come to Courtin, who had never had any occasion to look him up; but the farmer had received an address from him, to which he was to write in the event that he had anything of importance to tell him.

Courtin did not write, but went himself. With some difficulty, he succeeded in finding, in the poorest quarter of the town, at the end of a "no-thoroughfare," damp and muddy, crowded with filthy houses, adorned with the stalls of second-hand dealers in dresses and clothes, a little shop, where, following the directions given him, he asked for M. Hyacinthe, and was taken up a sort of

ladder and shown into a little apartment, much cleaner than was promised by the exterior aspect of the hovel.

There Master Courtin found his Aigrefeuille acquaintance, who received him much more graciously than the general had done, and with whom he had a long interview.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEREIN MASTER COURTIN IS ONCE MORE
DISAPPOINTED.

If the day seemed long to Michel, it was almost interminable to Courtin. It seemed to him as if the night would never come; and although he had carefully avoided showing his face in Rue du Marché or any of the contiguous lanes, he could not refrain from working off his impatience in the neighborhood.

When evening at last arrived, he remembered Michel's rendezvous with Mary, and returned to the Point du Jour, where he found Michel impatiently awaiting him.

"Courtin," he said, as soon as he caught sight of him, "I am overjoyed to see you! I have discovered the man who followed us this morning."

"Hein! What do you say?" ejaculated Courtin, falling back a step, in spite of himself.

"I have discovered him, I tell you!" the young man repeated.

"Who is he, pray?"

"A man on whom I thought I could rely, and on whom, in my position, you certainly would have relied yourself, — Joseph Picaut."

"Joseph Picaut!" echoed Courtin, feigning surprise.

"Yes."

"Where did you run across him?"

"At this inn, my dear Courtin, where he is ostler, — that is to say, where he is playing that part just now."

"The devil! And how did he follow you? Can you have been imprudent enough to intrust your secret to him, — ah, young man, young man," said Courtin, "how true it is that youth and imprudence go together! — to an old galley-slave?"

"That 's just the reason! You know how he came to go to the galleys?"

"*Dame!* yes; for robbery, armed with deadly weapons, on the highway."

"True; but in a time of civil commotion. However, that's not the question. I gave him a commission to execute; that's the fact."

"If I were to ask you what it was," said Courtin, "you would think that I asked from curiosity; and yet it would be from interest, nothing else."

"Oh, I have no reason for hiding from you the mission I gave him. I instructed him to notify the captain of the '*Jeune Charles*' that I would come aboard of her at three o'clock in the morning. Well, neither horse nor man has been seen since! By the way," added the baron, laughing, "the horse was your old nag, my poor Courtin, — your nag, which I took at the farm and rode to Nantes."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Courtin; "so that *Joli Cœur* —"

"*Joli Cœur* is probably lost to you."

"Unless he has found his way back to the stables," said Courtin, who, even when he had his gaze fixed on the golden horizon opening before him, deeply regretted the twenty or twenty-five pistoles which his steed represented.

"Well, what I wanted to say was that if it was Joseph Picaut who followed us, he is probably lying in wait somewhere about here."

"What for?" queried Courtin. "If he had wanted

to give you up, nothing could have been easier than to send the gendarmes here to take you."

Michel shook his head.

"What! no?"

"I tell you I'm not the one he's after, Courtin. I tell you that it was not on my account he was dogging our steps last night."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because my head is n't put at a sufficiently high figure to pay for such an act of treachery."

"Who was the spy after, then?" the farmer inquired, calling to his assistance the most innocent expression he could muster up, both in voice and feature.

"A Vendean leader whom I desired to take away with me," replied Michel, who saw what his interlocutor was aiming at, but was not sorry to let him half-way into his secret, so that he might make use of him when the time came.

"Aha!" said Courtin. "Can he have found out the hiding-place of this Vendean chief, then? That would be unfortunate, Monsieur Michel!"

"No, he only got inside the first line, fortunately; but I am afraid he'll be in better luck the second time, if he devotes his attention to us again."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, if he watches us this evening, he will find out that I have an appointment with Mary."

"Ah, *mordieu*! you're right."

"So I am somewhat uneasy," said Michel.

"Take my advice, and do one thing."

"What's that?"

"Take me with you this evening. If I see that you are followed, I can warn you with a whistle to get out of the way."

"But how about yourself?"

Courtin began to laugh.

"Oh, I run no risk. My opinions are well known, thank God! and in my capacity of mayor, I can frequent bad company with impunity."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said Michel, laughing. "But wait a moment; what time is that?"

"Nine is striking on the Bouffai clock."

"Come along, then, Courtin!"

"So you're going to take me?"

"Of course."

They took their hats and left the house, and hastened to the corner where they met, the night before.

The farmer had on his right Rue du Marché and on his left the lane, upon which the door he marked with a cross opened.

"Stay here, Courtin," said Michel; "I am going to the other end of the lane. I don't know which way Mary will come; and if she comes by you, bring her to me. If she comes my way, do you come near us, so as to lend your assistance in case of need."

"Never fear," said Courtin, as he took his station.

His satisfaction was unmeasured; his plan had completely succeeded. In one way or another he was to come in contact with Mary. Mary he knew to be Petit-Pierre's closest confidante. He would follow Mary when she and Michel parted; and he had no doubt that she, not suspecting that her steps were being dogged, would lead him straight to the hiding-place of the princesse.

Half after nine striking on all the clocks of Nantes surprised Courtin in his revery. The harsh vibrations of the metallic voices had hardly died away when he

heard a light step coming toward him. He walked toward the sound, and recognized Mary in a young peasant woman, wrapped in a cloak and carrying a small parcel in her hand.

As she saw a man who was, apparently, on guard, she hesitated about going any farther.

Courtin thereupon went straight to her, and made himself known.

"It's all right, it's all right, Mademoiselle Mary," said he, in response to the girl's manifestations of delight; "but I'm not the one you're looking for, am I? It's Monsieur le Baron; he's over yonder, waiting for you," pointing to the other end of the lane.

She thanked him, with a nod, and hurried away in the direction indicated; while he, sure that the interview would be a lengthy one, philosophically took his seat upon a stone. From that stone, however, he could keep an eye on the young people, cogitating, the while, his prospects for the future, which seemed so bright. In the person of Mary he had hold of one end of the thread of the labyrinth, and he had strong hopes that it would not break this time.

But he had no opportunity to build any lofty castles upon the golden clouds of his imagination. The young people exchanged but a few words, and then came toward him.

They passed directly in front of him. The young baron was walking on air, with his *fiancé* on his arm and the little parcel in his hand.

He nodded his head to the farmer.

"Oho!" said the latter to himself; "is it going to be so simple a matter as this? Indeed, there's not much merit in it."

But as this promptness suited him to a dot, he did not

cause Michel to nod his head again, but started off, a few steps behind the lovers.

It was not long, however, before the worthy farmer began to feel somewhat ill at ease. Instead of heading for the upper part of the town, where Courtin instinctively felt that the hiding place was located, they went down toward the river.

Courtin followed all their movements with great uneasiness; but he soon decided that Mary must have some errand to do in that direction, and that Michel, as was natural, was going with her to execute it.

His anxiety, however, became more pronounced when, as he came out upon the quay, he saw them making for the Point du Jour, and going boldly in under the *portecochère* when they reached that hostelry.

At that sight he could not contain himself, and hurried forward to overtake the baron.

"Ah, there you are. I'm glad you've come!" said Michel, as he caught sight of him.

"Why, what's the matter?" Courtin asked.

"Courtin, my friend," replied the young man, "the matter is that I am the happiest man on earth!"

"How so?"

"Help me saddle two horses; quick!"

"Two horses?"

"Yes."

"Don't you propose to take Mademoiselle home?"

"No, Courtin; I am carrying her off."

"Where?"

"To Banlœuvre, where we will concert measures for escaping all together."

"And Mademoiselle Mary abandons thus —"

He checked himself just in time; but he came very near betraying himself.

Michel, however, was too happy to be suspicious.

"Mademoiselle Mary abandons no one, my dear Courtin," said he. "We shall send Bertha here in her place. You understand that I can't undertake to tell Bertha that I don't love her."

"So! Who is to tell her, then?"

"Don't worry about that, Courtin; some one will undertake it. Come, let's saddle the horses; quick!"

"Have you horses here, pray?"

"No, I have no horses of my own here; but there are horses, you understand, at the service of those who are travelling for the good of the cause."

He pushed Courtin before him into the stables, where they found two horses munching oats, as if they had been provided in anticipation of the needs of the young people.

As Michel was placing the saddle on the back of one of them, the landlord appeared with Mary.

"I come from the South, and am going to Rosay," said Michel to him, going on with his task, while Courtin was doing the like with the other horse, though more slowly.

The farmer heard the pass-word, but failed to comprehend it.

"All right," the landlord replied, nodding his head as a sign that he understood; and as Courtin was behind-hand, he assisted him to saddle his steed.

"But why go to Banlœuvre and not to La Logerie?" said the mayor of that borough, making a last effort. "I thought you were not so badly off at La Logerie."

Michel looked questioningly at Mary.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "Just consider, my friend, that Bertha will go straight there, in the hope of having news of us, and of finding out why the ship

did n't appear at the place appointed; and I don't want to see her until the person you know of has seen her and talked with her. It seems to me that I should die of shame and grief to stand face to face with her."

At this second mention of the name of Bertha, Courtin pricked up his ears, like a horse at sound of trumpet.

"Yes, Mademoiselle is right," he volunteered to say. "Don't go to La Logerie."

"But, look you, Mary—" Michel began.

"What is it?"

"Who will hand your sister the letter summoning her to Nantes?"

"Oh, as for that," said Courtin, "there'll be no difficulty about finding a messenger; and if that's your only difficulty, why, I'll undertake to do it myself."

Michel hesitated; but, like Mary, he dreaded to be a witness of Bertha's first paroxysms.

He consulted Mary once more with his eyes, and she replied with an affirmative nod.

"To Banlœuvre, then," said Michel, handing the letter to Courtin. "If you have anything to tell us, Courtin, you will find us there."

"Oh, poor Bertha! poor Bertha!" sighed Mary, vaulting upon her horse. "I shall never forgive myself for being so happy!"

Michel, also, was in the saddle, and they waved their hands to the landlord. Michel once more enjoined Courtin to have great care of his letter; then they rode away from the Point du Jour inn.

At the end of the Pont Rousseau they almost overturned a man, whose face was hidden in the folds of a sort of mantle which he wore, in spite of the heat.

This ghost-like apparition startled Michel, who urged his horse along, and told Mary to do the same. He

looked around shortly after. The man had stopped, and it was not too dark for them to see that he was watching them.

"He's looking at us! he's watching us!" said Michel, with an instinctive feeling that danger had been near him.

They passed out of the stranger's sight, and he kept on into Nantes.

At the door of the Point du Jour he stopped; and looking around, as if in search of some one, he saw a man reading a letter in the stable, by the light of the lantern.

He approached him with sufficient noise to make him raise his head.

"Aha! it's you, is it?" said Courtin. "Faith! you came near arriving too soon. You would have found me in company which would hardly have suited you."

"Who were the two young people who nearly knocked me over, at the end of the bridge?"

"The very ones I was speaking of."

"Well, what's the news?"

"Good and bad; but more good than bad."

"Is it to be this evening?"

"No; it's postponed."

"You mean fallen through, bungler!"

Courtin smiled.

"It's true that I have been playing in hard luck since yesterday," said he; "but then, let's be content to walk, and not think about running. However unfruitful it may have been, in point of immediate result, my day to-day has been a day which I would n't have missed for twenty thousand livres."

"Aha! are you quite sure?"

"Yes; and I have something to back up what I say."

"What is it?"

"This," said Courtin, holding up the letter, which he had just unsealed and read.

"A letter?"

"A letter."

"What's in it?" said the man in the mantle, putting out his hand to take it.

"One moment. We will read it together; but I propose to keep it, for I have been instructed to deliver it."

"Let's see it," said the man.

They drew near the lantern, and read together:—

Come to me as soon as possible. You know the pass-words.
Your affectionate

PETIT-PIERRE.

"To whom is the letter addressed?"

"To Mademoiselle Bertha de Souday."

"Her name is not upon the envelope nor anywhere on the letter."

"Because a letter may be lost."

"And you are intrusted with the delivery of it, you say?"

"Yes."

The man looked at it a second time.

"It's her writing, sure," said he. "Ah, if you had let me come with you, we should have had her by this time."

"What do you care, so long as you get her some time?"

"That's so. When shall I see you again?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Here, or in the country?"

"At Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu. It's half way between my home and Nantes."

"You'll see that I don't put myself out for nothing again?"

"I promise you."

"Try to keep your word; I do so. And here's the money ready, in my pocket; it won't keep you waiting."

As he spoke, the stranger opened his portfolio and complacently exhibited to the farmer a bunch of bank-notes, amounting, perhaps, to a hundred thousand francs.

"Ah!" said Courtin; "paper?"

"Paper! Yes, of course; but signed 'Garat.' That's a good signature."

"That makes no difference," said Courtin; "I prefer gold."

"Well, you shall be paid in gold, then," said the man in the mantle, putting his portfolio back in his pocket and crossing the ends of his mantle over his coat.

If the two had not been so absorbed in their conversation, they might have observed a peasant who had climbed up on the wall from a cart in the street, and had been listening to them for several minutes, and gazing from his post of observation upon the bank-notes with an expression which signified, beyond question, that if he had been in Courtin's place, he would not have been so hard to suit, but would have been perfectly content with Garat's signature.

"Well, then, until the day after to-morrow, at Saint Philbert," said the stranger.

"Till the day after to-morrow."

"At what hour?"

"Oh, toward evening."

"Let us say seven o'clock. The one who arrives first will wait for the other."

"And you will bring the silver?"

"No; gold."

"That's right."

"You hope to finish it up day after to-morrow, do you?"

"*Dame!* we must always hope. It costs nothing to hope."

"Day after to-morrow, at seven o'clock, at Saint Philbert," said the peasant, sliding down again from the wall into the street. "I'll be on hand."

He added, with a laugh which much resembled a grinding of teeth:—

"When one is branded, one must earn his brand."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEREIN THE MARQUIS DE SOUDAY GOES DREDGING FOR OYSTERS AND CATCHES PICAUT.

BERTHA, who had left La Logerie with Michel, joined her father within two hours.

She found him tremendously cast down, and completely disgusted with the cenobite life he was leading in the rabbit-hole Master Jacques had arranged for him in accordance with his individual tastes, and in which he had installed him.

Like Michel, but from a sentiment of pure chivalry, M. de Souday could never have been prevailed upon to leave La Vendée while Petit-Pierre was in danger. But upon receiving information from Bertha of the probable departure of the chief of their party, the old Vendean nobleman had resigned himself, entirely without enthusiasm, to follow the advice given him long before by General Dermoncourt, and take up his abode for the third time on foreign soil.

So they left Touvois forest. Master Jacques, whose wounded hand was almost cured, and who had got off with the loss of two fingers, determined to go with them to the coast, and assist them about their embarkation.

It was about midnight when the three travellers, who were following the Machecoul road, found themselves on the heights above the valley of Souday.

As he saw the weather-cocks of his château glistening in the moonlight, amid the sheets of dark verdure which encompassed it, the marquis could not repress a sigh.

Bertha heard him, and drew nearer to him.

"What's the matter, father?" queried she. "What are you thinking about?"

"Many things, my poor child," the marquis replied, shaking his head.

"Don't get down-hearted, father! You are still young and strong; you will live to see your house again."

"Yes," sighed the marquis, "but—"

He stopped, almost suffocated with emotion.

"But what?" asked Bertha.

"I shall never find my poor Jean Oullier there again."

"Alas!" sighed Bertha.

"Oh, my house, my poor house!" cried the marquis; "how empty you will seem to me then!"

Although there was vastly more selfishness than attachment to his servant in the marquis's regret, poor Jean, if he could have heard him, would certainly have been deeply touched.

"Well, do you know, father, why it is I can't say, but I am utterly unable to believe, whatever they say, that the poor fellow is really dead. Sometimes I weep for him, but it seems to me that if he were really dead I should weep more; and invariably there comes a secret hope, which I can't explain, to dry my tears."

"Now, it's very queer," Master Jacques interposed, "but I feel as Mademoiselle does. No, Jean Oullier is not dead, and I have something besides presumption to go upon: I have seen the corpse which was said to be his, and I did n't recognize it."

"But what can have become of him, then?" asked the Marquis de Souday.

"Faith! I don't know," replied Master Jacques; "but I expect every day to hear from him."

The marquis sighed again.

At this moment they were crossing a corner of the forest. Perhaps he was thinking of the hecatombs of game he had slaughtered beneath its leafy vaults which he thought, alas! he was never to see again; perhaps the few words Master Jacques had said had opened his heart to the hope of seeing his faithful servant once more. This was the more probable supposition, for he several times urged the master of the Rabbits to make inquiries as to Jean Oullier, and let him know the result.

When they reached the coast, the marquis did not adopt in its entirety the plan formed by his daughter and Michel for their embarkation. He was afraid that by laying off and on waiting for them in the bay of Bourgneuf, as had been agreed, the schooner might attract the notice of the cutters which were doing police-duty on the coast. He was unwilling to lay himself open to the reproach of having compromised Petit-Pierre's safety in his own interest, and he decided that he and his daughter must put out to sea to intercept the "Jeune Charles."

Master Jacques, who had sources of information all along the shore, found a fisherman who, for a few louis, agreed to take him in his boat, and put them aboard the schooner.

The boat was lying aground upon the bank; the Marquis de Souday and Bertha, under the supervision of Master Jacques, crept into her as she lay there, thus eluding the watchful eyes of the customs officers, who were on duty thereabouts. An hour later, the flood tide floated her; the skipper and his two sons, who formed his crew, went aboard, and stood out to sea.

As it still lacked nearly an hour of daybreak, the marquis waited only until they were fairly off, before leaving his hiding-place under the half-deck, where he

was even less comfortable than in Master Jacques' rabbit-hole.

When he appeared, the fisherman began to question him.

"You say, monsieur," said he, "that the vessel you are expecting was to come out of the river?"

"Yes," the marquis replied.

"What time was she to leave Nantes?"

"Between three and five in the morning," said Bertha.

The fisherman looked aloft reflectively.

"With this wind," said he, "she won't need more than four hours to get here."

"The wind is from the southwest," he continued, making his reckonings; "the tide was high at three o'clock. She should be here by eight or nine. Meanwhile, and in order not to bring the coast-guards down upon us, we must pretend to do a little work with the dredge, which will serve as an excuse for tacking about at the mouth of the river."

"What! pretend?" cried the marquis; "why, I should like above all things to go fishing in earnest. All my life I have longed to have a taste of that sport; and since hunting is out of the question for me this year in Mache-coul forest, it's altogether too great a compensation that Heaven sends me, for me to let it slip."

And the marquis, disregarding the remonstrances of Bertha, who feared that her father's great height would betray him even to those at a distance, set about assisting the fishermen in their work.

They let down the net, and moved it back and forth for some time on the bottom; the Marquis de Souday, who heartily lent a hand on the cable to pull it in, was as pleased as a child with the conger-eels, turbot, plaice, skate, and oysters, which came up with it from the depths of the sea.

He forthwith forgot his regret, his sad souvenirs, his vanished hopes, Souday and Machecoul forest, the swamp of Saint Philbert, and the great moors, and with them the wild boar, the roe, the foxes, the hares, the partridges and snipe, to lose himself completely in admiration of the smooth or scaly multitudes which each cast of the net put before his eyes.

At last the day broke; and Bertha, who thus far had been sitting pensively in the bow, buried in thought, and absently watching the waves separate into two phosphorescent furrows before the prow of the little barque, — Bertha mounted a great coil of cable, and scanned the horizon anxiously.

Through the morning mist, which lay heavier along the river's mouth than in the offing, she perceived the lofty masts and spars of several vessels; but not one of them carried the blue pennant by which the "Jeune Charles" should be distinguishable. She called the fisherman's attention to the fact, and he reassured her by asserting positively that the schooner, leaving Nantes during the night, could not have reached the mouth of the river so soon.

The marquis, however, gave the worthy fisherman but little opportunity to discourse with his daughter; for he had taken such a fancy to the profession of these good people that he allowed only the shortest possible intervals to elapse between casts of the net; and even those intervals he employed in making the old sailor instruct him in the rudiments of nautical science.

He was greedily absorbing these instructions when the skipper called his attention to the fact that in thus casting the net as if they were out for that purpose and no other, they must necessarily make a considerable offing, and would end by getting a long way from the shore and

their post of observation; but the marquis, with his constitutional indifference, paid no attention to the caution, but continued to fill the small hold of the boat with the products of his angling.

Thus it got to be about ten o'clock, and they had seen nothing. Bertha was very uneasy, and had communicated her fears to her father several times, so that the marquis, urged by her, could do no less at last than consent to sail nearer the mouth of the river.

He took advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to have the old sailor explain to him the process of sailing close to the wind, — that is to say, of trimming the sails so as to make the smallest angle with the keel that the rigging will permit; and they were deep in the most complicated part of the subject, when Bertha uttered a loud cry.

She had just discovered, a few fathoms away, a large vessel with all sail set, of which she had hitherto taken no notice, because she was not flying the signal agreed upon.

"Look out," she cried, "look out! A vessel is bearing down on us!"

The skipper turned, and a single glance was enough to show him the extreme peril of their situation. He roughly snatched the tiller out of the marquis's hands, and without noticing that he had overturned him upon the deck, quickly put his helm down so as to get out of the way of the stranger without accident.

But he was not prompt enough to prevent a collision. The keel of the smack scraped noisily against the side of the schooner; her gaff caught for a moment in the bowsprit. She careened, and shipped a sea; and if the skipper had not handily kept her sails full, and got her clear, she would not have righted so quickly, if she had righted at all.

"The devil fly away with the misbegotten coaster!" cried the old fisherman. "A second more and we would have gone to the bottom to take the place of the fish we've been hauling in."

"Go about! go about!" yelled the marquis, exasperated by his fall. "Run up alongside, and I'm damned if I don't go aboard and ask the captain what he means by his insolence."

"How in Heaven's name do you suppose we can overhaul that great gull with two miserable little jibs and a paltry mainsail? She has the canvas, the beggar! All her stunsails set! How she goes! She does go, though!"

"We must overtake her, all the same," cried Bertha, coming aft, "for it's the 'Jeune Charles!' And she pointed out a broad band of white paint on the stern, whereon was printed in gilt letters, —

LE JEUNE CHARLES.

"You're right, Bertha, on my soul!" shouted the marquis. "Put her about, my friend, put her about! But how does it happen that she's not flying the signal agreed upon with M. de la Logerie? How does it happen, too, that she's heading southwest, instead of for the Bay of Bourgneuf, where we were to meet her?"

"Perhaps some accident has happened," said Bertha, turning as white as her handkerchief.

"God grant it's not to Petit-Pierre!" muttered the marquis.

Bertha admired her father's stoical self-forgetfulness; she, too, whispered a prayer, but her words were, —

"God grant it's not to Michel!"

"No matter!" said the marquis, "we must find out where we stand."

The little craft meanwhile had jibed, and considerably

increased her speed. This manœuvre, executed with great rapidity on a vessel of such small tonnage, prevented the schooner, notwithstanding her greater spread of canvas, from increasing her lead to any extent.

The fisherman hailed her, and the captain appeared on deck.

"Are you the 'Jeune Charles,' just from Nantes?" the skipper demanded, using his hands as a speaking-trumpet.

"What's that to you?" replied the master of the schooner, whose good humor was by no means restored by his certainty that he was out of the clutches of the law.

"If you are, I have passengers for you," shouted the skipper.

"More police agents! Ten thousand devils! If you've got any more of the kind I had last night, I'll run you down, old oyster-scraper, before I'll let you come aboard."

"No; these are passengers. Don't you expect passengers?"

"I expect nothing but a fair wind to put me round Cape Finisterre."

"Let me come alongside," said the skipper, at Bertha's suggestion.

The captain of the "Jeune Charles" looked at the sea, and as he was unable to discover anything between himself and the shore to arouse any apprehension, and was somewhat curious, too, to know whether the passengers in question were the same ones whom he had been originally hired to take, he acceded to the skipper's request, and took in his upper sails, so as to lessen his speed.

The two craft were soon near enough for a line to be thrown aboard the fisherman, and he was hauled under the schooner's taffrail.

"Well, now, what is it?" the captain demanded, leaning over the vessel's side.

"Request M. de la Logerie to come and speak to us," said Bertha.

"M. de la Logerie is not on board," replied the captain.

"Even if he's not," rejoined Bertha, in a troubled voice, "you certainly have two ladies on board."

"As to ladies," replied the captain, "I have absolutely nobody but a rascal, with leg-irons on, who is cursing and swearing in the hold hard enough to take the masts out of the schooner, and shake the bulkheads he's fastened to."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Bertha, with a shudder, "do you know whether anything went wrong with the persons you expected to take on board?"

"Faith! my pretty girl," said the captain, "if you can explain to me what it all means, you will oblige me beyond measure; for deuce take me if I can make head or tail of it! Last evening two men came aboard, both from M. de la Logerie, but on very different errands; one wanted me to get under way on the instant, the other told me to stay and wait. Of these two men, one was an honest farmer,—a mayor, I think; he showed me something like the end of a tricolored scarf. He was the one who would have me up anchor and away as quick as I could. The other—the one who wanted me to wait—was an old convict. I believed the one who seemed to me the most respectable of the two customers,—or who was, to say the least, the least compromising. I came away."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" said Bertha, "it was Courtin; something must have happened to M. de la Logerie."

"Would you like to see this man?" the captain inquired.

"What man?" said the marquis.

"The one below, in irons. You may perhaps recognize him; perhaps we shall succeed in getting at the truth, although it's too late now to do any good."

"Too late to go away, true," said the marquis; "That would do us no good; but it may help us to save our friends from danger. Show us the man."

The captain gave an order, and a few seconds later Joseph Picaut was brought on deck. He was still bound and in irons; but despite his bonds, as soon as he caught sight of his native La Vendée, which he was in danger of never seeing again, without reckoning the distance from the shore, or the impossibility of his swimming, he made an attempt to escape from those who held him, and to plunge into the sea.

This took place on the starboard side, and the passengers on the little smack, being hidden behind the stern, could see nothing of it; but by the cry uttered by Picaut, and the uproar on deck, they could tell that a fight of some sort was going on aboard the "Jeune Charles."

The skipper pushed his boat along the quarter of the schooner, and they saw Joseph struggling with four men.

He was on the verge of success in his endeavors to throw himself into the water, when he recognized the features of the Marquis de Souday and Bertha, who were looking on at the scene in dumb amazement.

"Oh, Monsieur le Marquis! Oh, Mademoiselle Bertha!" he cried, "you will rescue me, I know; for it was for carrying out M. de la Logerie's orders that this beast of a captain treated me in this way, and the lies of that dog Courtin were the cause of it."

"Come, how much truth is there in all this?" demanded the captain; "for, I confess, if you can rid me of this scamp, you will do me a great favor. I was not chartered for Cayenne or Botany Bay."

"Alas!" said Bertha, "it's all true, monsieur. I don't know what motive the mayor of La Logerie had in sending you to sea; but this man, unquestionably, is the one of the two who told you the truth."

"Unbind him, then, ten thousand cats! and let him go and get himself hung wherever he chooses.—Now, what will you do? Are you with us, or not? Will you stay here? Will you go with me? It won't cost me any more to take you; I was paid in advance, and to square it with my conscience, I should not be sorry to take somebody."

"Captain," said Bertha, "is there no possibility of going back into the river, and carrying out the plans that were made for last night to-night?"

"Impossible!" replied the captain, shrugging his shoulders. "Do you forget the custom house—and the police? No, a game postponed is a game lost. But I say again, if you choose to use my craft to get to England, I am at your service; and it sha'n't cost you anything."

The marquis looked at his daughter, but she shook her head.

"Thank you, captain, thank you," M. de Souday replied, "but it's not to be thought of."

"Then we must part," rejoined the captain; "but first, allow me to ask you to do me a little favor."

"What is it?"

"It concerns a little bill which I propose to hand you all receipted, and which I wish you would settle for me with the debtor, when you settle your own."

"I will do anything I can to oblige you, captain," replied the marquis.

"Well, then, just agree to give a hundred strokes of the cat or so to the blackguard who made a fool of me last night."

"It shall be done!" said the marquis.

"Yes, if he has strength enough left to bear them after he has paid me what he owes me personally," interposed a voice.

The next moment there was a splash of a heavy body in the water, and a second later, Joseph Picaut's head appeared on the surface a few yards away, and he swam vigorously toward the smack.

Once freed from his irons, the Chouan, evidently terribly afraid that some unforeseen circumstance might keep him on board the schooner, had taken a flying leap over her side.

The skipper and the marquis held out their hands, and with their help Picaut climbed aboard the fishing-boat.

"Now, Monsieur le Marquis," said he, as soon as he was out of the water, "just tell that old whale up there that the brand on my shoulder is my cross of honor."

"In truth, captain," said the marquis, "this peasant was condemned to that infamous punishment for doing his duty under the empire,—from our point of view, at least; and although I don't altogether approve his plan of operation, I can assure you that he didn't deserve the punishment you inflicted on him."

"Oh, well," said the captain, "everything is for the best. Once, twice, thrice, will you come aboard of me?"

"No, captain, thank you."

"*Bon voyage*; then!"

With these words the captain ordered the cable which kept the vessels together to be cast off, and the schooner filled away on her course, leaving the smack stationary.

While the old skipper was shaping her course for the shore, Bertha and the marquis took counsel together.

They were not able, with all the assistance Picaut could give them,— which was necessarily little, as he had not seen Courtin until the moment he caused his arrest,—to conceive the motive which had influenced the mayor of La Logerie to act as he did; but his conduct could not fail to appear very suspicious. And although Bertha reminded her father of his really devoted care of Michel, and the attachment to his master which she had heard him express, the marquis was decidedly of opinion that such tortuous actions denoted the existence of schemes which threatened not Michel's safety alone, but his friends' even more.

Picaut, for his part, declared flatly that thenceforth he should live only to be revenged; and that if M. de Souday would give him a sailor's outfit, for purposes of disguise as well as to replace the clothes which were torn in his struggle with the schooner's men, he would start for Nantes as soon as he stepped ashore.

The marquis, fearing that Courtin's treason might be aimed at Petit-Pierre, also wanted to go to the town; but Bertha, who had no doubt that Michel, as soon as his escape had become impossible, would return at once to La Logerie, expecting that she would go there to meet him, made him postpone that trip until they were more fully informed as to what had taken place.

The fisherman set his passengers ashore on the lee side of Pornic Point. Picaut, to whom one of the skipper's sons turned over his reefer and sou'wester, plunged into the fields, and after taking his bearings,

made a bee-line for Nantes, swearing in every key that Courtin had best look to himself.

But before he left the marquis, he requested him to inform the leader of the Rabbits of his adventure, feeling sure that Master Jacques would, like a true brother, take a hand in his schemes of vengeance.

Thus it was that, aided by his thorough knowledge of the ground, he reached Nantes about nine in the evening. He naturally went to the Point du Jour, to resume his former position; and while taking such precautions about going in as his situation made necessary, it fell to his lot to be present at Courtin's interview with the man from Aigrefeuille, to overhear part of what they said, and to see the silver—the bank-notes, rather—which Courtin considered less valuable than a like sum in gold.

Not till night-fall was it safe for the marquis and his daughter, despite Bertha's impatience, to start for Touvois forest; and the old gentleman was chagrined almost beyond endurance at the thought that the happy morning of that day had no to-morrow, and that he must, perforce, resign himself to being shut up like a rat in a trap, for an indefinite period.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN TWO UNOCCUPIED HOUSES.

MASTER JACQUES' presumptions did not lead him astray. Jean Oullier was not dead.

The bullet which Courtin had let fly at him at hazard, had pierced his breast; and when the widow Picaut, whose wagon it was that Courtin and his companion had heard, came upon the scene, she thought that it was a dead body which she found lying in the road.

With a sentiment not unnatural in a peasant woman, she shrank from the thought that the body of a man, for whom her husband, notwithstanding their political differences, had always expressed great regard, should become food for birds and beasts of prey. She desired that the Vendean's body should lie in consecrated ground; and she lifted him into her wagon to carry him home.

But instead of putting him beneath the straw she had brought for that purpose, she laid him on top of it; and several peasants whom she met on the way were able to see and touch the ghastly, bleeding body of the Marquis de Souday's old retainer.

In that way Jean Oullier's death was noised abroad through the canton, and thus reached the ears of the marquis and his daughters; in that way Courtin, who had undertaken to ascertain for himself the next morning whether the man he feared most had ceased to be an object to be feared,—in that way Courtin was misled like the rest.

To the house she had lived in during her husband's lifetime, and had left a short time after poor Pascal's death to take up her abode with her mother at the village inn at Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu,—it was to that house that the widow Picaut carried Jean Oullier's body.

It was nearer to Machecoul, Jean Oullier's parish, and Bouaimé moor where she found him, than the inn where she had contemplated hiding him if he had been alive.

As the wagon was passing the cross-roads we have so often mentioned, whence one road led to the house of the brothers, the funeral procession met a man on horseback riding toward Machecoul.

This man—who was none other than our former acquaintance M. Roger, the doctor from Légé—questioned one of the urchins who were following the wagon with the persistent inquisitiveness of their age; and having learned that Jean Oullier's body was inside, he rode with it to the Picaut abode.

The widow laid Jean Oullier on the same bed on which she had placed Pascal and poor Bonneville side by side in death.

While she was busy performing the last duties, and washing away the blood and dust from the Vendean's face, she spied the doctor.

"Alas, dear Monsieur Roger," she said, "the poor *gars* does n't need you, more's the pity! There are so many worthless creatures who remain on earth, that one always has to weep twice as much for those who go before their time."

The doctor made the widow tell him what she knew about Jean Oullier's death. The presence of her sister-in-law and her children, and of certain women who had followed the wagon, prevented Marianne from telling how she had talked with Jean Oullier, then very much

alive, a few hours earlier; how, as she was going to fetch him with the wagon, she had heard the report of a gun, and the steps of men running away from the spot; and, finally, how she had come to the conclusion that Jean Oullier had been murdered; she simply told him that she found the body on the road, as she was returning from the moor.

"Poor, brave man!" exclaimed the doctor. "After all, such a death was better for him (for it was at least a soldier's death) than the fate which was in store for him if he had lived. He was very seriously compromised; and, if taken, he would doubtless have been sent, like the rest, to the dungeons of Mont Saint Michel."

As he spoke he mechanically went up to Jean Oullier, lifted his lifeless hand, and placed his hand on his chest. But it no sooner came in contact with the flesh than the doctor started.

"What's the matter?" the widow asked him.

"Nothing," was the cold reply; "the man is dead, indeed, and demands nothing more than the last sad rites from us who survive him."

"What need had you to bring this corpse here?" said Joseph's wife, sourly. "It may bring down a visit from the Blues, and you can judge by the first what the second would be."

"What is it to you," asked the widow, "when neither you nor your husband live here now?"

"We left here for that very reason," replied Joseph's wife. "We were afraid of bringing them down on us, if we stayed, and thus losing the little that remains."

"You will do well to have him identified before burying him," the doctor interposed; "and if it will be inconvenient for you, I will see to having him taken to the Marquis de Souday's house, whose physician I am."

Seizing an opportunity when the widow passed close to him, the doctor whispered to her,—

“Send everybody away.”

As it was near midnight, it was an easy thing to do, and when they were left alone the doctor went to Marianne’s side, and said,—

“Jean Oullier is not dead.”

“What! not dead?” cried she.

“No; and my reason for keeping my mouth shut before that crowd was, that the most important thing is to make sure that no one will annoy you in the care which I am certain you will bestow upon him.”

“May God hear you!” said the delighted widow. “And if I can help to put him on his feet, rely upon it that I will do it with the greatest delight; for I shall never forget my late husband’s friendship for him. I shall always remember that Jean Oullier would not allow me to be murdered, although I was at the very time doing an injury to his friends.”

Having carefully closed the window-shutters and the door of her cottage, she lighted a great fire, heated some water, and while the doctor was probing the wound, and ascertaining whether any vital organ was injured, she bade adieu to the few women who were still waiting around, and pretended to be about to return to Saint Philbert.

At a bend in the road she turned into the woods, and came back to the house through the orchard.

Joseph Picaut’s house was closed, and she heard no sound within, when she listened at the door.

It was clear that her brother-in-law’s wife and children had returned to the hiding-place where they were accustomed to abide, while the husband and father continued to take part in partisan warfare.

Marianne re-entered her own house by the door opening into the yard. The doctor had finished dressing the wound, and the signs of life on the part of the wounded man became more unmistakable moment by moment.

The pulse was beating perceptibly, as well as the heart, and the breath could be felt coming from his lips.

The widow listened joyfully to these details.

"Do you think you can save him?" she asked.

"That is God's secret," was the doctor's reply. "All I am able to say is, that no vital organ is injured; but he has lost an enormous quantity of blood, and, besides that, I can't extract the bullet."

"But I have heard it said that men have been cured, and lived many years, with bullets in their bodies."

"Very possibly," said the doctor. "But what are you going to do now?"

"My purpose was to take the poor fellow to Saint Philbert, and keep him in hiding there until his death, or restoration to health."

"That is difficult just now. His life will be saved, if at all, by what we call the clot; and any shock may be fatal to him. Besides, in your mother's inn at Saint Philbert where there are so many always going and coming, it would be impossible for you to keep his presence a secret."

"*Mon Dieu!* do you suppose they would arrest him when he's in this condition?"

"They would n't put him in prison, certainly; but they would take him to some hospital or other, which he would be allowed to leave only to await in a dungeon his sentence, which is sure to be infamous at least, even if not capital. Jean Oullier is one of those ob-

scurry leaders, dangerous because of their influence over the people, on whom the Government will have no pity. Why don't you confide in your sister-in-law? Are n't she and Jean Oullier politically in accord?"

"You heard what she said."

"True,—I understand that you have no confidence in her sympathy; yet God knows that she of all people ought to have compassion on her neighbor, for her husband, if taken, might well meet a worse fate than Jean Oullier's."

"Yes, I know it well," said the widow, in a sombre voice; "there is death upon his soul!"

"Well, can you hide him here?" the doctor asked.

"Here? Oh, yes, indeed; he would be safer here than anywhere else, as the house is supposed to be deserted. But who will take care of him?"

"Jean Oullier is n't a girl," replied the doctor, "and two or three days hence, when the fever has abated somewhat, he can very well be left alone during the day; and I agree to visit him every night."

"Good! And I will stay by him all the time that I can without arousing suspicion."

With the doctor's assistance she carried the wounded man into the stable adjoining the house; she securely bolted the door, and laid her mattress on a truss of straw. Then having made an appointment with the doctor for the following night, and knowing that the invalid would need nothing for a few moments but fresh water, she threw herself on a bag of straw near him, waiting until he should manifest his return to life by words, or even a sigh.

The next day she showed herself at Saint Philbert; and when she was asked what had become of Jean Oullier, she replied that she had followed her sister-in-

law's advice, and had carried the body back to the moor, for fear of being annoyed.

Then she returned to her house, on the pretext of putting it in order. When night came she made a great parade of closing it, and went back to Saint Philbert before it was very dark, so that everybody might see her.

During the night she returned to Jean Oullier.

She nursed him thus three days and nights, shut up with him in the stable, fearing to make the slightest noise which might betray her presence there; and although at the end of that time Jean Oullier was still in the state of collapse which is the ordinary consequence of great physical upheavals and the loss of great quantities of blood, the doctor induced her then to spend her days at home, and to take her post in the sick-room only at night.

Jean Oullier's wound was so severe that he hung between life and death for nearly a fortnight. Fragments of clothing, detached by the bullet and carried into the body with it, caused the inflammation to last a long while; and it was not until the force of Nature had expelled them that the doctor, to the widow Picaut's great delight, was willing to answer for the Vendean's life.

She redoubled her anxious care of him as he grew better; and although he was still so weak that he could barely mumble a few words with the greatest difficulty, and the grateful signs he made with his head were the only visible proofs of his improved condition, she never once failed to pass the night by his bedside, taking the most minute precautions to escape detection.

However, as soon as Oullier's system was relieved of the foreign substances which had been forced into it,

regular suppuration ensued, and he made rapid strides toward convalescence. - But as his strength returned, he began to be anxious about those who were dear to him; and he besought the widow so earnestly to ascertain what had become of the marquis, Bertha, Mary, and even Michel,— who had certainly overcome the old fellow's antipathy and won a place in his heart,— that she made inquiries of the travellers of Royalist proclivities who put up at her mother's caravansary, and was soon able to assure Jean that all his friends were alive and at liberty,— that the marquis was in Touvois forest, Bertha and Michel at Courtin's farm, and Mary probably at Nantes.

But the widow had no sooner uttered the name of the occupant of the farm of La Logerie than a complete change took place in the wounded man's countenance. He passed his hand across his forehead, as if to straighten out his ideas, and for the first time sat up in bed.

Friendship and affection had first filled his thoughts. Then his bitter hatred and his longing for vengeance came pouring into his brain, and worked him up to a pitch of excitement which was all the more violent because those ideas had been so long asleep.

To her great alarm, La Picaut heard him repeating the things he kept saying in his fever, and which she had then taken to be mere hallucinations. She heard Courtin's name coupled with charges of treachery, of cowardice, and murder. She heard him talking of vast sums as the price of a crime; and while saying these things, the invalid was in a frenzy of excitement. His eyes gleamed with fury and his voice shook with emotion as he begged Marianne to seek out Bertha and bring her to his bedside.

The poor woman thought the fever had come back

again, and was much disturbed because the doctor had said he should not come again until the night of the second day following. She promised, however, to do all that Jean asked.

He became somewhat calmer at that. He lay down again; and gradually, exhausted by the violent paroxysm of emotion, fell asleep.

The widow, seated on some scattered pieces of straw by the sickbed, was beginning to feel, herself, the effects of fatigue. Sleep was creeping over her and her eyes closing, in spite of her efforts to keep awake, when she thought she heard an unusual noise in the yard.

She listened, and heard a man's step on the stone which lay around the edges of the refuse, with which the yard of the two houses was strewn.

Soon the latch of the door of the other house was lifted, and Marianne heard a voice, which she recognized as Joseph Picaut's, call, "This way! this way!" Whereupon the steps came toward the house.

The widow knew that her brother-in-law's house was empty, and this nocturnal call upon Joseph aroused her eager curiosity. She had no doubt that some scheme, of the sort dear to the Chouan by tradition and inheritance, was in the wind, and she determined to listen.

She softly raised the cover of one of the holes through which the cows, when there were any in the stable, put their heads to take their fodder from the floor of the adjoining room; and having succeeded in removing the board, she slipped through the narrow aperture into the main room of her house. Then she swiftly and noiselessly ascended the ladder, on which the Comte de Bonneville had met his death, climbed into the attic, which, as the reader will remember, was common to

both houses, put her ear to the floor over her brother-in-law's room, and listened.

She arrived in the midst of a conversation already well under way.

"And you saw the money?" said a voice, which was not altogether unfamiliar to her, but which she could not locate.

"As plainly as I see you," replied Joseph Picaut. "It was in bank-notes; but he demanded that it should be paid him in gold."

"All the better! For notes, you see, in any quantity, have n't much attraction for me; they are hard to dispose of in our neighborhood."

"But I tell you he will have gold."

"Good! And where are they to meet?"

"At Saint Philbert, to-morrow evening. You have plenty of time to get your boys together."

"Are you mad? My boys! How many did you say there would be?"

"Two, — my reptile and his companion."

"Very well; two against two. That's war, as Georges Cadoudal of glorious memory would say."

"But you have only one hand now, Master Jacques."

"What difference does that make, so long as it's a good one? I will take care of the biggest one."

"One moment! That's not in our agreement."

"What do you mean?"

"I want the mayor for myself."

"You are grasping."

"Oh, the villain! The least he can do is to pay me for what he has made me go through."

"If they have the sum you say, there'll be enough to compensate you, even if they had sold you as a slave. Twenty-five thousand francs! You are not worth that, my good man, I know."

"Perhaps not; but I propose to rate myself above the market-price, when I take my revenge. I have had a grudge against him a long while, the cursed dog! He was the cause —"

"Of what?"

"Never mind; I know!"

Picaut's reply was unintelligible to everybody but Marianne. She fancied that the memory at which the Chouan recoiled was connected with the death of her poor husband, and she shuddered from head to foot.

"Oh, well," said the other, "you shall have your man. But before we begin this thing, you swear, don't you, that what you have told me is true, and that it is really the Government's money that we are going after? For, otherwise, I won't have anything to do with it."

"*Pardine!* Do you suppose a fellow like that is rich enough to make such presents out of his own pocket to that canting rogue? And it's only on account, too. I heard them say so."

"But you don't know what it is that he's paying such a high price for."

"No; but I have a shrewd suspicion."

"Tell us."

"It's my opinion, you see, master, that in wiping these two rascals off the face of the earth, we shall do two good strokes of business with one stone, — our private matter, in the first place, and a political stroke besides. But be patient. To-morrow I shall know more, and will tell you."

"*Sacrédié!*" exclaimed Master Jacques; "you make my mouth water. Look here, I withdraw my promise. You shall only have what is left of your man."

"What's left of him! What do you mean?"

"Before letting you settle your account with him, I propose to have a word to say to him."

"Bah! Do you imagine you can get his secret out of him in that way?"

"Oh, when he is once my prisoner, I'm sure of it!"

"He's a sly fox!"

"How's this? Don't you, with your experience of the old days, remember that there are ways of making a man speak who wants to keep his mouth shut, no matter how sly he is?" said Master Jacques, with a wicked laugh.

"Oh, yes, — putting fire to the soles of the feet. You're right, upon my word; and that will avenge me even better," rejoined Joseph.

"Yes. And in that way we can find out, without doing ourselves harm, how and why the Government sends these little sums of fifty thousand francs to the mayor, on account. That might be worth more to us than the gold we put in our pockets."

"Oho! Gold has its value, too, especially in the case of old offenders like us, who are liable to leave our heads on the Bouffai. With my share, — twenty-five thousand francs, — I can live anywhere."

"You can do as you please. But say, where are these friends of yours to meet? We mustn't miss them, on any account."

"At the inn at Saint Philbert."

"In that case the thing will take care of itself. Doesn't the inn practically belong to your sister-in-law? We will give her a share; it will be all in the family."

"Oh, no, not by any means!" Joseph replied. "In the first place, she's not one of us; and then, we haven't spoken since —"

"Since when?"

"Since my brother's death, if you must know."

"Ah, çà! So it's true, is it, as I've been told, that you held the candle, if you did n't actually hold the knife?"

"Who says that?" cried Picaut; "who says that? Give me his name, Master Jacques, and I'll pulverize him as I do this stool."

Thereupon, the widow heard her brother-in-law dash the stool, upon which he was sitting, on the hearth and break it into a thousand pieces.

"Oh, don't get excited! What do you suppose I care?" retorted Master Jacques. "You know very well that I don't mix myself up in family quarrels. Let's get back to business. You were saying—"

"I was saying that we must not strike the blow at my sister-in-law's."

"Then we must do it out in the country somewhere. But where? For they will come by different roads, without doubt."

"Yes; but they will go away together. The mayor will have to take the Nantes road as far as Tiercet, to get home."

"Well, then, we'll lie in wait for them on the Nantes road, among the reeds that border it. It's a good hiding-place; and I have done more than one bit of work there, before this."

"All right. Where shall we meet? I shall get away from here in the morning, before daylight," said Joseph.

"Meet me at the Carrefour des Ragots, in Machecoul forest," said the master of the Rabbits.

Joseph agreed to the place suggested, and promised to be there. The widow heard him offer Master Jacques

a night's lodging beneath his roof; but the old Chouan, who had his lair in every clump of woods in the canton, preferred those sylvan retreats to all the houses in the world,—for safety, if not for comfort.

So he took his leave, and silence reigned in Joseph Picaut's dwelling.

Marianne returned to her stable, and found Jean Oullier sleeping heavily. She chose not to awaken him, although the night was so far advanced that it was time for her to be off to Saint Philbert.

She placed everything Jean could need during the day within his reach, and went out, as usual, through the stable window.

She made the journey to Saint Philbert, deep in thought. She nourished a deadly hatred against her brother-in-law because of her abiding conviction that he had connived at Pascal's death; and her isolation and the bitter pain of widowhood made her desire for revenge more insatiable, with every night that passed.

It seemed to her that Heaven, by putting her so miraculously in the way of discovering the secret of a new criminal project of Joseph, had signified its approval of her feelings. She believed that she should be assisting to carry out the designs of the Almighty, while glutting her own hatred, by preventing the commission of the contemplated crime, and the ruin and death of those whom she could but look upon as innocent; so she renounced her first idea, which was to denounce Master Jacques and Joseph, either to the authorities or to those whom they proposed to rob and murder, and determined to constitute herself the sole intermediary between Providence and the victims of the projected deed of blood.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEREIN COURTIN FINALLY TOUCHES HIS FIFTY THOUSAND FRANCS WITH THE END OF HIS FINGER.

PETIT-PIERRE's letter to Bertha gave Courtin no information beyond the mere fact that she was at Nantes, and expected Bertha to join her there. There was no hint of her abiding-place, or of the measures to be taken to get to her.

Courtin was in possession, however, of one important piece of information,—that, namely, concerning the house with the two exits, of which he had unearthed the secret.

For a moment he thought of continuing to play the part of spy and of following Bertha when she should come to Nantes in obedience to Petit-Pierre's commands, his idea being to turn to his own profit the young girl's misery when she learned the outcome of the love affair of Michel and Mary,—an outcome which he proposed to disclose to her in such way and at such time as his own interest seemed to demand. But the farmer had begun to doubt the efficacy of the methods he had employed thus far. He realized that his last hope of success would be lost forever if chance, or the watchfulness of those he was spying upon, should once more baffle his clever stratagems; so he decided to adopt a different plan, and to take the initiative.

Was the house, which had one egress upon Rue du Marché and another upon the lane, to which we have taken the reader several times, inhabited? If so, who

lived there? Was it not possible to get at Petit-Pierre by means of its occupant? Such were the first questions the mayor propounded to himself, after he had come to the determination above alluded to.

To solve them, he must remain at Nantes; and Master Courtin had no sooner thought of that than he gave up returning to his farm, where it was very probable that Bertha already was expecting him.

He adopted an audacious course.

The next morning, at ten o'clock, he knocked at the door of the mysterious house; but instead of presenting himself at the door on the lane, which he had marked, he tried the door on Rue du Marché.

It was what he had seen Michel do; and his purpose was to make sure that both doors gave entrance to the same house.

When the person who came to answer the knock had satisfied himself, with the assistance of a little grated wicket, that the visitor was alone, he opened (it would be more accurate to say half-opened) the door.

The two heads found themselves nose to nose.

"Where are you from?" the one on the inside demanded.

Bewildered by the abruptness with which the question was hurled at him, Courtin replied, —

"*Pardieu!* from Touvois."

"We're not expecting anybody from there," retorted the door-keeper, pushing the door to, as he spoke.

But it was no easy matter to close it, for Courtin wedged himself in.

A ray of light entered his brain. He remembered the words used by Michel to procure horses at the Point du Jour inn; and he guessed that those words, which he failed then to understand, were a countersign.

The man on the inside kept on pushing, but Courtin braced himself against the door.

"Wait a moment; just wait a moment," said he. "When I pretended to be from Touvois, it was only to make sure that you were in the secret. One can't be too cautious, *dame!* I am not from Touvois, you see, but from the South."

"And where are you going?" demanded the other, without yielding an inch.

"Where do you suppose that I am going, coming from the South, if not to Rosay?"

"All right!" replied the domestic. "No one gets in here, my friend, without showing clean [*blanc*] hands, you see."

"That's not difficult for those who are white [*blanc*] throughout," said Courtin.

"Humph! all the better," replied the man, a low Breton, who, as he spoke, was playing with the beads of a rosary which was twisted around his hand.

But as Courtin had made answer according to rule to the questions put to him, the Breton, notwithstanding the repugnance he seemed to have to performing the duty, escorted him into a little room, and motioned to him to be seated.

"Monsieur is engaged," said he. "I will take you to him as soon as he has finished his business with the person now in his closet. Take a seat, unless you have the means of passing the time more profitably."

Courtin found himself rather farther advanced than he had counted on. He had hoped to find the house occupied by some inferior agent, from whom he reckoned upon procuring, by trickery or bribery, the information he needed. When the man who opened the door spoke of introducing him to his master, he real-

ized that the affair was becoming more serious, and that he must prepare a fable, to meet the exigencies of the situation.

He abandoned the idea of questioning the servant, whose harsh and forbidding countenance denoted one of those rock-ribbed fanatics, such as are still met with occasionally in the Celtic peninsula.

Courtin realized, on the instant, the game he had to play.

"Yes," said he, assuming an expression at once humble and benign, "I will wait until Monsieur is at liberty, consecrating the interval to prayer. Will you allow me to take one of these 'Hours'?" he added, pointing to one of the books which lay on the table.

"Don't touch those books, if your purpose is as you pretend," replied the Breton. "Those are not 'Hours,' but profane literature. I will lend you my prayer-book," the peasant continued, taking from the pocket of his embroidered coat a little book, with covers and edges completely blackened by time and use.

In the act of putting his hand to his pocket, he disclosed the shining barrels of a pair of pistols stowed away in his broad belt; and Courtin congratulated himself the more for having risked no attempt to corrupt him, as he seemed just the man to respond with a pistol-ball.

"Thank you," he said, taking the little book, and kneeling with such a devout air that the servant, highly edified, removed the hat which covered his long locks, crossed himself, and went out, closing the door very softly behind him, so that no one might disturb such a holy man in his devotions.

As soon as he was left alone, the farmer felt the need of making a careful examination of the apartment; but

he was not the man to be guilty of such a mistake, — he thought that they might be watching him through the key-hole. So he restrained himself, and remained on his knees, apparently absorbed in prayer.

While mumbling his *paternosters*, in an undertone, however, Courtin looked about him as well as he could. He was in a small room, about twelve feet square, separated from another apartment by a partition in which there was a second door. It was modestly furnished in black walnut, and lighted by a window which opened upon the courtyard, the lower panes being guarded by a very fine iron grating, painted green, which prevented any person on the outside from seeing who was in the room.

He listened for the sound of voices, but every precaution had doubtless been taken; for although he pricked up his ears toward the door of the adjoining room, and also on the side of the fireplace, near which he was kneeling, not a whisper could he hear.

But as he was bending over into the fireplace the better to listen, he spied on the hearth, amid the ashes and charred wood, some crumpled papers which had been placed in a pile to be burned. They tempted him; he let his arm fall, and gradually stretched it out, laying his head against the chimney-piece, picked up all the papers one by one, and opened them without changing his position, feeling certain that the table in the middle of the room would suffice to hide all his movements from the observation of those who might be watching him.

He had scrutinized and thrown aside several of these papers, as having no interest for him, when he perceived a few lines of fine and elegant handwriting on the back of one which contained on its face nought but worthless memoranda, and which he was on the point of throwing

back on the hearth with the others. The character of the writing caught his attention, and he read these words: —

“If any one annoys you, come at once. Our friend desires me to tell you that there is a room at your service in our place of refuge.”

The note was signed “M. DE S,” and was evidently written by Mary de Souday.

Master Courtin put it carefully away in his pocket; in an instant his clever brain realized all the advantage he might reap from that scrap of paper.

Having stowed it away, he continued his investigations, which convinced him that the owner or tenant of the house was delegated to keep account of Petit-Pierre's expenditures.

Suddenly there was a sound of voices and steps in the hall.

Courtin at once rose and went to the window.

Through the iron network he saw the domestic escorting a man toward the gate. The man held in his hand a large empty money bag, which he folded and put in his coat pocket before going out.

At first Courtin saw only the back of the visitor; but as he passed in front of the servant to pass through the garden-gate, he saw that it was Master Lorient.

“Aha!” said he, “that fellow, too! He's in it, is he? and he brings them money! Upon my soul, that was a bright idea of mine to come here!”

He resumed his place by the hearth, for he fancied that the time had arrived for his audience.

When the peasant opened the door, he was, or seemed to be, so deep in prayerful meditation that he did not stir. The peasant walked up to him, touched him

lightly on the shoulder, and told him to follow him. Courtin did so, after he had ended his prayer as he began it, by making the sign of the cross, in which the Breton piously joined him.

The farmer was shown into the room where Pascal received Michel on his first visit; but this time he was occupied with more important business than on the former occasion. He was sitting at a table loaded down with documents, and Courtin fancied that he could see the glitter of gold pieces under a heap of open letters which seemed to him to have been piled up for the purpose of hiding said gold pieces.

Master Pascal intercepted the farmer's glance. He at first took no offence, attributing it to the feeling of curious wonder which prompts peasants always to stare at gold and silver. However, he preferred that his curiosity should not be excited too far, and so, pretending that he had to search for something in a drawer, he picked up the end of the green cloth which covered the table and hung down to the floor, and threw it over his papers.

Then he turned to his caller.

"What do you want?" he asked roughly.

"To execute a commission."

"Who sends you?"

"M. de la Logerie."

"Aha! so you belong to our young friend, do you?"

"I am his tenant-farmer, his confidential man."

"Pray speak, if that's the case."

"But I don't know whether I ought to do so," replied Courtin, impudently.

"Why not?"

"Because you are not the one M. de la Logerie sent me to."

"To whom then, my good man?" retorted Master Pascal, frowning with annoyance.

"To another person, to whom you are to take me."

"I don't know what you mean," said Pascal, unable to restrain an impatient shrug at what he considered unpardonable recklessness on the part of Michel.

Courtin noticed his annoyance, and saw that he had gone too fast; but it was dangerous to retreat too suddenly.

"Well," said Pascal, "what do you say? Will you tell me your errand, or won't you? I have no time to throw away."

"*Dame!* my kind sir, I don't know what to do," said Courtin; "I am fond enough of my master to throw myself into the fire for him. When he says to me, 'do this,' or 'do that,' I try to execute his orders and deserve his confidence; and you are not the one that he told me I was to speak to."

"What's your name, my fine fellow?"

"Courtin, at your service."

"Of what parish are you?"

"La Logerie."

Master Pascal took out his memorandum and turned over the leaves for a few seconds; then he fixed a searching and suspicious gaze upon the farmer.

"You are mayor?" he asked.

"Yes, since 1830."

"It was my mistress, Madame la Baronne, who procured my appointment," he added, remarking Master Pascal's increasing coldness.

"Did M. de la Logerie give you any but a verbal message for the person to whom he sent you?"

"Yes, I have a bit of a letter here; but it's not for that person."

"Might I see your bit of a letter?"

"To be sure; there 's nothing secret about it, for it's not sealed."

He handed Pascal the letter Michel had given him for Bertha, in which Petit-Pierre begged Bertha to come to Nantes.

"How does it happen that this paper is still in your hands? It seems to be dated more than twenty-four hours ago."

"Because one can't do everything at once. I shall go home very soon, however, and I ought to find the person to whom the note is to be given, waiting for me there."

Master Pascal's eyes had never left the mayor's face since he had failed to find the name of Courtin among those who were known to be Royalists; that functionary now assumed the rôle of idiot which had succeeded so well with the captain of the "Jeune Charles."

"Well, goodman," said Pascal, "it's out of the question for me to take you to anybody else to do your errand. Speak, if you think fit; if not, return to your master, and tell him to come himself."

"I won't do that, my dear monsieur," Courtin replied. "My master is condemned to death, and I am not anxious to bring him back to Nantes; he's better off at home. I am going to tell you the whole thing; you can make it your business, and if Monsieur is not content, he can scold me — I don't care."

This naïve outburst somewhat reconciled Master Pascal to the farmer, whose first reply had alarmed him seriously.

"Say on, my good fellow, and I will agree that your master won't scold you."

"It won't take long. M. Michel instructed me to say to you, or rather to Petit-Pierre — for that is the name of the person he sent me to —"

"All right," said Pascal, smiling.

"That he had discovered the man who was responsible for the vessel's sailing a few moments before Petit-Pierre, Mademoiselle Mary, and himself reached the rendezvous."

"Who is the man?"

"A fellow named Joseph Picaut, who was last employed as ostler at the Point du Jour."

"As a matter of fact, that man has n't been seen since yesterday morning," exclaimed Pascal. "Go on, good Courtin."

"That this Picaut must not be trusted if he appears in the town, and that he was going to have a lookout kept for him in the Bocage and the open country. That's all."

"Very well; you will thank M. de la Logerie for the information, and now that I have received it, I can assure you that it has reached its address."

"I ask no more than that," said Courtin, rising.

Master Pascal showed the notary to the door with extraordinary courtesy, and did for him what he failed to do for Master Lorient himself, — he accompanied him to the street-gate.

Courtin was too shrewd to misconstrue these attentions, and he was not at all surprised to hear the little gate open and close again before he had taken twenty steps. He did not turn to look; but, certain that he was being shadowed, he lounged along like a man with nothing to do, stopping in open-mouthed wonder in front of all the shop-windows, reading all the placards, and carefully avoiding any act which could go to confirm the suspicions which he had not been able to drive out of Pascal's mind.

This constraint cost him little. He was delighted with his morning's work, and considered that he was well on the road toward reaping the fruit of his labors.

When he was opposite the Hôtel des Colonies, he spied Master Lorient on the stoop, talking with a stranger.

Courtin, feigning profound astonishment, walked boldly up to the notary, and asked him how it happened that he was at Nantes on a day when there was no market.

He then begged Master Lorient to give him a seat in his cabriolet, which he agreed with great heartiness to do, telling him, however, that he had several matters to attend to; and as he should be detained at Nantes four or five hours longer, he suggested that he should wait for him at some café.

The café was a luxury which the farmer never permitted himself to indulge in under any circumstances, — that day less than ever; his religious fervor would not allow him to visit even a *cabaret*. He went piously to church, where he attended vespers; then he returned to Master Lorient's hotel, sat down on the steps, and went to sleep, or pretended to, in the shade of one of the yews which stood before the door, — the calm and peaceful sleep which betokens a clear conscience.

Two hours later the notary returned; he informed Courtin that he was obliged to prolong his stay at Nantes, and consequently should not be able to return to Lége until ten o'clock or thereabouts.

That did not fall in with the plans of the farmer, who was to meet M. Hyacinthe — the name assumed by his Aigrefeuille acquaintance — at Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu at seven that same evening.

Therefore he told M. Lorient that he should have to forego the honor of travelling with him, and set out on foot; for the sun was beginning to sink, and he wanted to reach Saint Philbert before dark.

When he reopened his eyes as he sat on the steps, he had seen the Breton servant watching him ; he pretended not to see that he was still on hand when he left the hotel on his way to keep his appointment. The servant followed him to the other side of the Loire without one single sign from the farmer of the uneasiness which is so apt to betray itself in the acts of those whose consciences are not tranquil ; so that the Breton retraced his steps, and told his master that they had done wrong to suspect the worthy peasant, who passed his spare time in none but the most harmless forms of amusement, and in unremitting devotional exercises. Thus Master Pascal began to think Michel not quite so blameworthy for bestowing his confidence upon so loyal a retainer.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE INN OF GRAND SAINT JACQUES.

A WORD as to the situation of the village of Saint Philbert; without this little topographical preface, which will be brief, like all our prefaces, it might be difficult to follow in all their details the scenes we are about to lay before the eyes of our readers.

The village of Saint Philbert lies on the left bank of the Boulogne, at the apex of the angle formed by that stream with the lake of Grand-Lieu.

The church and the principal houses are nearly a kilometre from the lake. The one broad street follows the course of the river; and the farther down stream one goes, the more scattered and meaner do the houses become; so that when one comes in sight of the vast expanse of blue water, surrounded with reeds, which brings the street to an end, there are to be seen only three or four wretched huts, occupied by the men who work the neighboring fisheries.

However, there is, or there was at this time, one exception to this sad falling-off from the flourishing condition of the dwellings of Saint Philbert. Some thirty yards from the huts we just now mentioned, there was a house built of brick and stone, with a red roof and green shutters, surrounded with stacks of hay and straw as a camp is with sentinels, and inhabited by a little world of cows, sheep, poultry, and ducks, the former lowing and bleating in the barn, while the others

cackled and clucked in front of the gate, and pecked away zealously in the dusty road.

The road served the purposes of a yard to the house, which, although it was without that useful appurtenance, was fully indemnified by its gardens, which were unquestionably the most magnificent and productive in the province.

One could see from the road, above the roofs, on a level with the chimneys, the tops of the trees, laden in spring with red and white blossoms, and in summer with fruit of all kinds; and these trees extended in the form of an amphitheatre over a space of two hundred metres to the south, and as far as a little hill crowned with a ruin, which overhung the waters of the lake of Grand-Lieu.

The house was the inn kept by the widow Picaut's mother.

The ruin was the old château of Saint Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.

The high walls, the gigantic towers of one of the most famous baronial castles of the province, built to hold the country-side in check, and to sweep the waters of the lake; the gloomy arches (whose echoes replied to the clashing spurs of Comte Gilles de Retz, when he walked the flags, meditating those fearful orgies which rivalled, if they did not surpass, all that the Romans of the second Empire ever imagined in that direction), to-day dismantled, dilapidated, festooned with ivy, covered with wild gillyflowers and fallen in on all sides, — had progressed from one step in the process of decay, to another, and so on down to the last of all. Grand, wild, awe-inspiring, as they once were, they had degenerated into mere humble usefulness, and had at last fallen so low as to help make the fortune of a family of

peasants, the descendants of poor serfs who could never look at the vast structure in old days without trembling.

The ruin sheltered the gardens from the north-west wind, the bitter foe of floriculture, and made of this little corner a veritable Eldorado where everything grew apace and prospered, from the indigenous pear-tree to the vine, from the *cormier*, with its bitter fruit, to the fig-tree.

Nor was this the only service the old feudal donjon rendered to its new proprietors: in the lower rooms, in which the air circulated freely, they had constructed store-rooms, where the products of the garden were kept in good condition long after their regular season, and consequently doubled in value. Lastly, in the dungeons, where Gilles de Retz used to stow away his victims, they had set up a dairy, the products of which in the way of butter and cheese were justly famous.

That is what time had done with the titanic work of the former lords of Saint Philbert.

A word now, as to what it had formerly been.

The château of Saint Philbert originally consisted of an immense parallelogram enclosed by walls, bathed on one side by the waters of the lake, and protected on the other by a broad moat cut in the solid rock.

Four square towers flanked the corners of this huge mass of stone. A donjon with portcullis and drawbridge defended the entrance; opposite the donjon, on the other side, a fifth square tower, higher and more imposing than the others, dominated the entire building, and the lake which lay on three sides of it.

With the exception of this last-named tower and the donjon, the whole fortress, walls and building, had crumbled away, and the tower itself was only partially spared. The rotten floor timbers of the first floor, incapable of

supporting the weight of the stones which were piled upon it in greater numbers every day, had fallen in upon the ground-floor, and raised it up a foot; and the arch of the platform was the only one left standing.

This ground-floor room was the spot where the widow Picaut's grandfather had established his principal fruit-room; and the walls were supplied with shelves, whereon the goodman used to spread, in winter time, all that his garden had yielded.

The doors and windows of this part of the tower were preserved in reasonably good condition; and at one of the latter could still be seen a rusty bar which was certainly of Comte Gilles's day.

The other towers and the walls of the main building were entirely gone. The masses of masonry had rolled down, some into the courtyard, which they obstructed; others into the lake, which covered them with reeds at all times, and with foam on windy days.

The donjon, like the tower of which we have been speaking, was almost intact, and was crowned with an enormous mass of ivy, which answered all the purposes of a roof. Within were two small rooms, which, notwithstanding the colossal proportions of the building, were not more than eight or ten feet square, so thick were the walls.

The interior courtyard — formerly used as an armory by the defenders of the castle — was so obstructed by the *débris* which the years had heaped up there, so strewn with pillars, whole battlements, arches, and dilapidated statues, as to be entirely impracticable. A little path led to the central tower; another, less plainly marked, led to a fragment of the eastern tower, where part of a stone staircase was still standing. By climbing this, a feat requiring extraordinary agility, those who

desired to enjoy a superb view could reach the platform of the principal tower by following an exterior gallery which ran along the wall like the Alpine roads, built along the sides of the cliff, with a sheer precipice on the one hand, and an impracticable mountain on the other.

It goes without saying that the ruins of the Château of Saint Philbert were seldom visited, except at the season when the fruit-rooms were stocked; at such times a watchman was kept there, who slept in the donjon. During the rest of the year the entrance to the tower was kept closed. From that moment the ruins were given over to the seekers for historic souvenirs, and the village urchins, who are always to be found in flocks among such old rubbish, where there are nests to rob, flowers to pick, risks to run, and everything else which children delight in.

It was in these ruins that Courtin had agreed to meet M. Hyacinthe. He knew that they were sure to be deserted at the time appointed, for the reputation of the spot was so bad that the first shadows of the night drove away all the youngsters, who played fearlessly around the ragged remnants of the donjon while the sun was shining.

The mayor of La Logerie left Nantes about five o'clock; he was on foot, and yet he made such rapid progress that it still lacked an hour of nightfall when he crossed the bridge leading to Saint Philbert.

In that hamlet Master Courtin was a personage of note; for him to turn the cold shoulder on the Grand Saint Jacques—the inn at which he ordinarily drew rein—in favor of the Pomme de Pin, as the *cabaret* kept by the widow Picaut's mother was called, would have been a noteworthy occurrence which would have set the

whole village agog with excitement. He was so well aware of this that, although it was at least a waste of time to go to the inn, as he had no horse, and never took anything except what was offered him, he stopped as usual before the door of the Grand Saint Jacques. There he had, with certain of the villagers of Saint Philbert, who had become somewhat more gracious to him since the two-fold reverse of Chêne and La Pénis-sière, a conversation which was not without importance in his eyes, in view of his situation.

"Master Courtin," one of them asked, "is this true that I hear?"

"What do you hear, Mathieu?" said Courtin. "Tell me that, and then I can answer you."

"Why, they say that you have turned your coat so that nothing shows but the lining; the result being that it's *white* now where it was *blue* before."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Courtin. "That's absurd!"

"It's your own actions that cause it, goodman; and since your worship has gone over to the Whites, it's a fact that we don't hear you chatter as you used."

"Chatter!" said Courtin, slyly; "What's the use of chattering? Bah! just let me alone. I am doing better than chattering now, and — you'll hear of it in time, my boy."

"All the better! all the better! For, look you, Master Courtin, all this disturbance is death to business; and if the patriots don't keep together, instead of being taken off by powder and ball like our fathers, we shall die of poverty and starvation; while, on the other hand, if we succeed in ridding ourselves of a lot of miserable ruffians who are prowling about here, why, matters will soon quiet down again, and that's all we want."

"Who are prowling around?" said Courtin. "It's

my opinion that ghosts are the only prowlers, just now."

"Bah! devil a ghost! It is n't ten minutes since I saw the biggest rascal in the country go by, musket on his shoulder, and pistols in his belt; and as boldly, too, as if there were no Red Breeches within a thousand miles."

"Who was that, pray?"

"Joseph Picaut, to be sure! — the man who killed his brother."

"Joseph Picaut here!" cried Courtin, with blanching cheeks. "Name of a pipe of cider, it is n't possible!"

"As true as you're standing there, Master Courtin. As true as there's only one God! He had on a sailor hat and coat, but that makes no difference; I knew him all the same."

Courtin thought a moment. The plan he had formed, which was based upon the existence of the house with two exits and Master Pascal's daily dealings with Petit-Pierre, might fall through, and in that case Bertha became his only remaining resource. There would then be only one possible means left of discovering Petit-Pierre's hiding-place, and that the same which had been unsuccessful when tried upon Mary, — to follow the young girl when she should go to Nantes. If Bertha should fall in with Joseph Picaut, that scheme was endangered; but it would be many times worse, if, through her, Michel and the Chouan should be brought together! In that event the part he, Courtin, had played, on the occasion of the abortive attempt at flight, would be disclosed, and he was lost.

He called for paper and pen, and wrote a few lines, which he handed to the peasant.

"There, *gars* Mathieu," said he, "there's the proof

that I am a patriot, and don't turn about like a weather-cock at the pleasure of the masters. You accuse me of following my young *bourgeois* in his mad pranks. Well, you can see that it's not true; for, although I have known his hiding-place only an hour, I am just about to have him nipped; and as often as I have an opportunity to put the enemies of my country out of the way, I shall lose no time about doing it, without asking myself whether it's to my interest or not, and without disturbing myself as to whether they're my friends or not."

The peasant, who was a double-dyed Blue, pressed Courtin's hand enthusiastically.

"Have you a pair of legs?" the farmer inquired.

"Ah, I believe you!" exclaimed the peasant.

"Well, take this to Nantes, then, on the instant. And as I have several other sheaves to get in, I rely upon you to keep it to yourself; for you can see that if it's known that I'm the one who caused the baron's arrest, my sheaves would run great risk of never getting into the barn."

The peasant gave Courtin his word; and as night was beginning to fall, the honest mayor left the inn, took a turn in the fields, and, retracing his steps, made for the ruins of Saint Philbert.

He walked along the edge of the lake, then took to the outer moat, and entered the courtyard by the stone bridge, which replaced the drawbridge formerly used in connection with the donjon.

He whistled softly when he reached the courtyard; whereupon a man, who was seated in the shadow of a huge mass of masonry, rose and came toward him.

It was M. Hyacinthe, as he expected.

"Is it you?" he asked, approaching cautiously.

"Yes," was the reply; "never fear."

"What's the news to-day?"

"Good; but this is n't the place to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because it's as dark as an oven here. I almost walked on you without seeing you. A man might be hidden at your feet and hear everything we say, and we know nothing of it. So, come; matters are in too good a shape just now to risk losing anything by carelessness."

"All right; but where can you find a place more lonely than this?"

"We must find one. If I knew of an absolute desert in the neighborhood, I would take you there; and even then I would speak low. But in default of a desert, we must find a place where we can at least be sure of being alone."

"Go on, then; I will follow."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TWO JUDASES.

COURTIN led his companion toward the central tower, stopping once or twice to listen; for he heard, or imagined that he heard, steps, and saw dark forms gliding about. But as M. Hyacinthe encouraged him at every pause, he finally confessed that his imagination had deceived him; and when they reached the tower, he pushed open the door, and went in first. Then he pulled a wax candle and a flint and steel out of his pocket, lighted the candle, poked it into all the corners,—in short, examined all the holes and recesses, in a way to make sure that no one was hidden in the old fruit-room.

A door cut in the right-hand wall, and half buried in the rubbish of the floor above, excited Courtin's curiosity, and disturbed him somewhat. He pushed against it, and found himself staring into a black hole, whence a damp vapor issued.

"Look there!" said M. Hyacinthe, pointing to the enormous opening in the wall, through which the lake could be seen gleaming in the moonlight. "Just look!"

"Oh, I see it," replied Courtin, laughing. "Mother Chompré's dairy needs repairs. Since I was here, the hole in the wall has doubled in size. You could come in there now with a boat."

He held his light high in the air, and tried to light up the black depths of the inundated underground

passage; but failing in that, he took a stone and threw it into the water. It fell with a splash, to which the echoes gave a sinister sound; while the water, stirred into little waves, responded to the splash by lapping softly the walls and the steps of the stairway.

"Well," said Courtin, "here there's nobody to hear us but the fish in the lake; and there is an old proverb, which says, 'Mute as a fish.'"

As he was speaking, a stone rolled down the outer wall from the platform, and fell upon the paving of the courtyard.

"Did you hear that?" M. Hyacinthe asked uneasily.

"Yes," replied Courtin, whose courage had returned to a considerable extent when he had assured himself that there was no one hidden in the courtyard; while his companion, on the contrary, seemed to be terrified by the gigantic shadow of the ruins,—"yes; but it's not the first time I have seen similar things and heard similar noises. I have seen great pieces of masonry fall from the top of these old towers, at the merest touch from a night-bird's wing."

"Ha, ha!" laughed M. Hyacinthe through his nose, —a laugh that suggested the German Jew,—"these birds of night are just what we have to dread."

"Chouans, yes," said Courtin. "But these ruins are too near the village; and although a scoundrel, whom I thought we were well rid of, has been seen prowling around the neighborhood,—indeed it was on his account I made such a careful investigation,—they would n't dare to risk it."

"Put out your candle, then."

"No, indeed. It's of no use, so far as talking is concerned; but we have something to do besides talk, if I remember right."

"Indeed?" said M. Hyacinthe, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"To be sure. Come into this recess, where we shall be in the shadow, and can hide our light."

He drew M. Hyacinthe under the arch of the door which opened into the subterranean passage, placed the light at the foot of a large stone in front of the door, and sat down on the steps.

"You were saying," said M. Hyacinthe, sitting down opposite Courtin, "that you would give me the name of the street and the number of the house where Petit-Pierre is in hiding."

"Or something very like it," said Courtin, who heard the clinking of gold pieces in M. Hyacinthe's belt, and whose eyes shone with greed.

"Well, let's not waste time in useless words. Do you know her present abode?"

"I do not."

"Then why inconvenience me? Oh, if there is one thing that I regret, it's that I ever had a word to say to such a slow coach as you!"

Courtin's sole reply was to take out the paper he had picked up in the ashes on the hearth of the house on Rue du Marché and hand it to M. Hyacinthe, holding the light, so that he could read it.

"Who wrote this?" the Jew asked.

"The girl I spoke to you about as being with the one we want."

"True; but she's not there now."

"That's so."

"That being so, I ask you what good this letter will do us? What does it prove? How can it help along our matter?"

Courtin shrugged his shoulders, and put back the light.

"Upon my word, for a gentleman from the city, you're pretty green," said he.

"What do you mean by that?"

"*Pardieu!* Don't you see that Petit-Pierre offers the person to whom that letter is addressed a place of refuge, in case he is disturbed?"

"Yes; what then?"

"Why, then we have only to disturb him to make him go there."

"And then?"

"We have only to search the house he makes his escape to, and find the whole party together."

M. Hyacinthe reflected.

"Yes, it's a good scheme," said he, turning the letter over and over, and passing it across the flame of the candle, to make sure that it contained no other writing.

"I should say it is a good scheme!"

"Where does this man live?" M. Hyacinthe asked carelessly.

"Ah, that's another matter!" said Courtin. "You know the details of the scheme, and you say yourself that it's a good one; but I won't put you in a way to carry it out until I am secured against loss, as the lawyers say."

"And suppose he does n't accept the shelter offered him? Suppose he does n't join the person we're after?" said M. Hyacinthe.

"Oh, in the way I will describe to you, it's impossible for him not to do it. The house has two exits. We will present ourselves at one door, with the soldiers; he will flee by the other, which we have purposely left free. There he will see no sign of danger; but we have men posted at each end of the street, and follow

him. You must see that the thing can't fail! Come, unbuckle your belt."

"Will you come with me?"

"Of course."

"From now until the plan is put in execution, you won't leave me a moment?"

"I shall be very careful not to, for you are only going to give me half of my share."

"But when you are once bought and paid for," said M. Hyacinthe, with a resolution of which, with his peaceful manners, he would hardly have been thought capable, "I tell you one thing: if you make a suspicious movement, if I see that you are deceiving me, I'll blow your brains out on the instant!"

While speaking, M. Hyacinthe drew from his breast a pistol, and presented it at the good mayor's head. His features, meanwhile, retained an expression of impassive calmness; but there was a glitter in his eye which told his associate that he was the man to do as he threatened.

"As you please," Courtin retorted; "and you'll find it all the easier, as I am unarmed."

"That's too bad," sneered M. Hyacinthe.

"Come, hand over what you promised me," said Courtin; "and do you swear, in your turn, that you will give me as much more if the thing comes off."

"That is sworn, and you can rely on it. Either I am honest, or I am not. But why need you load yourself down with this gold, if we are not to separate?" continued M. Hyacinthe, who seemed to feel as reluctant to let his belt go as Courtin was eager to get his hands on it.

"What!" cried the farmer. "Why, don't you see that I'm in a perfect fever to feel the gold, and play

with it; that I am dying to know that it's there, to say nothing of holding it in my hand? Why, I have braved every danger just for the moment's pleasure I am going to have directly in feeling it roll through my fingers; for you're going to give it to me, or else I won't open my mouth! I have become bold, who used to be afraid of my own shadow, and to tremble when I had to walk through an avenue after dark. Give me the gold; give me the gold, monsieur! We still have many perils to face, many risks to run; and the gold will give me courage. Give me the gold, if you want me to be as cool and pitiless as you are!"

"Yes," replied M. Hyacinthe, who had noticed how the dull, lifeless features of the peasant lighted up, as he uttered these words,— "yes, in exchange for that man's address, I will give it to you. But the address! Give me the address!"

Each one was as eager as the other for the one thing he expected.

M. Hyacinthe rose, and loosened his belt. Courtin, intoxicated anew by the clinking of the metal, put out his hand to grasp it.

"One moment!" said M. Hyacinthe. "A fair exchange."

"Very well. But first of all, let's see if it's really gold you have there."

The Jew gave an impatient shrug, but did as his associate desired, nevertheless. He unfastened the little steel chain which closed the leather pocket; and Courtin, dazzled by the glittering gold, felt a shudder pass through his frame. With his neck stretched forward, staring eyes and trembling lips, he thrust his hands, with indescribable delight, into the mass of gold pieces, and let them run through his fingers.

"He lives," said he, — "he lives on Rue du Marché, No. 22. The second door is on the lane parallel to Rue du Marché."

Master Hyacinthe let go his hold on the belt, and Courtin seized it, with a long-drawn breath of satisfaction; but almost immediately, he raised his head in alarm.

"What's the matter?" asked M. Hyacinthe.

"Hush! This time I'm sure I heard somebody walking," exclaimed the farmer, in great agitation.

"No, you did n't," said the Jew; "I heard nothing. I clearly did wrong to give you that gold."

"Why so?" demanded Courtin, pressing the belt against his breast, as if he feared it might be taken from him.

"Why, because it seems to increase your cowardice."

With a quick movement, Courtin put his hand on his companion's arm.

"Well, what is it now?" asked the latter, beginning to feel uneasy himself.

"I tell you, I hear somebody walking over our heads," said Courtin, looking up at the arch, which was as black and gloomy as ever.

"Nonsense! You're not going to be ill, are you?" said the Jew, weakly trying to laugh.

"Indeed, I don't feel very well."

"Let's go, then. We have nothing more to do here, and it's time we were on our way to Nantes."

"Not yet."

"Why not yet?"

"Let us hide and listen. If any one is walking up there, we are being watched; and if some one is watching us, they'll be lying in wait for us at the door. Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* are they after my gold so

soon?" cried the farmer, still holding the belt close to his side, but trembling so that he could not put it around his waist.

"Well, you are losing your head, and no mistake," said M. Hyacinthe, who turned out to be the brave one of the two. "Let's put out the light, first of all, and hide in the underground passage, as you suggest. From there we can see if you're mistaken."

"You are right; you are right," said Courtin, blowing out the candle. He proceeded to pull open the door of the inundated underground passage, and went down the first step.

But he went no farther. He uttered a shriek of terror, in which these words could be distinguished, —

"Help, Monsieur Hyacinthe!"

The latter was putting his hand to his pistol, when a strong arm grasped his, and twisted it till it almost broke.

The pain was so great that the Jew fell on his knees, with the sweat pouring from his brow, crying for mercy.

"One word, one movement, and I'll kill you like the dog you are!" growled the voice of Master Jacques.

"Well, dawdler," he said to Joseph Picaut, who had come in behind him, "have you got him? Well, well!"

"Oh, the villain!" replied Picaut, in a stifled voice, gasping with the efforts he was making to hold Courtin, whom he had seized just as he was opening the door into the passage, and who was making desperate struggles to save, not himself, but his gold. "Oh, the brigand! He's biting me! he's tearing me to pieces! Oh, if you had n't forbidden my letting his blood, how quickly I'd have finished him up!"

At the same moment, there was a crash, as of two bodies falling together upon the ground. They rolled

over and over to within two steps of the prostrate form of M. Hyacinthe, whom Master Jacques was holding down.

"If he keeps on kicking, kill him! kill him!" said Master Jacques. "Now that I know what I wanted to know, I don't see any objection."

"*Mordieu!* Why didn't you say so sooner, master? It would have been all done by this time."

Indeed, Joseph Picaut seemed to desire nothing so much as that permission. By a supreme effort he forced Courtin over on his back, put his knee on his chest, and drew from his belt a keen-edged knife, the blade of which Courtin saw gleam in the darkness.

"Mercy! mercy!" he cried. "I will tell everything; I will confess everything. Only, don't kill me."

The hand of Master Jacques caught Picaut's arm, which was about to do speedy execution upon the farmer, notwithstanding his promise.

"No," said Jacques, "not yet. I think, on reflection, that he may be of some use to us. Tie him up like a sausage, so that he can't move hand or foot."

Poor Courtin was so terrified that he held out his hands, of his own accord, to Joseph, who bound them with a cord which he had provided himself with, at Master Jacques' suggestion.

The farmer, however, did not even then let go his belt of gold, but kept it pressed close to his stomach with his elbows.

"Well, will you never be done?" the chief of the Rabbits asked.

"Just let me put a cable around that paw," said Joseph.

"All right; all right. And then you may do as much for this one," continued Jacques, pointing to

M. Hyacinthe, whom he had allowed to rise upon one knee, in which posture he remained, mute and motionless.

"I could do it faster if I could see," said Joseph Picaut, vexed at having made a knot which he could not untie.

"After all," said Master Jacques, "why the devil should we inconvenience ourselves? Why don't we light our lantern? It will rejoice my soul to see the faces of these dealers in kings and princes."

He drew from his pocket a small lantern, and lighted it with a flint and steel as calmly as if he had been in the heart of Touvois forest. Then he threw the light on M. Hyacinthe's face and Courtin's.

By the rays of the lantern, Joseph spied the leather belt which the farmer was holding against his body, and rushed at him to seize it.

Master Jacques misconstrued the movement. He thought that the Chouan, giving way to his bitter hatred for the mayor of La Logerie, proposed to kill him; and he threw himself upon him, to balk him in that design.

At the same instant, a sheet of flame in the upper part of the tower lighted up the darkness. A sharp report was heard; and Master Jacques fell over upon Courtin, who felt a warm fluid pouring over his face.

"Ah, you villain!" cried Master Jacques, rising to his knees, and addressing Joseph. "Ah, you led me into a trap! I forgave your lie; but you shall pay for your treachery!"

And he laid Pascal's brother low, with a shot from his pistol, at close range. -

The lantern rolled down into the lake, and went out.

The smoke from the two shots made the darkness more dense than ever.

M. Hyacinthe, when he saw Master Jacques fall, rose to his feet, — pale, speechless, and mad with fear, — and ran hither and thither around the donjon, without finding any way out. At last he spied the stars shining in the dark vault of heaven, through one of the narrow windows; and with the strength which terror lends, giving no thought to his confederate, he climbed up to the window, and plunged head foremost into the lake, without reckoning the distance or the danger.

The sudden immersion in the cold water cooled his blood, which was careering about in his brain at insane speed, and restored his reasoning powers intact.

He came to the surface of the water; and swimming to keep afloat, he looked about to see in which direction he had best turn, and saw a small boat fastened in the excavation, through which the waters of the lake entered the tower.

It was, doubtless, the means employed by the two men to get into the inundated subterranean passage.

M. Hyacinthe, shuddering with apprehension, swam to it, climbed into it, with as little noise as possible, seized the oars, and pulled out into the lake. He never thought of his companion until he was five hundred yards from the shore.

“Rue du Marché, twenty-two,” he cried. “No, my fright has n’t made me forget anything. Success now depends on the rapidity with which I can get back to Nantes. Poor Courtin! I think that I may now fairly consider myself the heir to the fifty thousand francs I have still to give him. But what an infernal fool I was to hand over my money-bag! But for that, I

should have the address and the money, too, at this moment. What a mistake! what a mistake!"

To stifle his remorse, the Jew bent to his oars and made the little boat fairly fly over the water, with an amount of strength which seemed entirely out of proportion to his weakly appearance.

CHAPTER XXXII.

EYE FOR EYE, TOOTH FOR TOOTH.

To follow M. Hyacinthe in his almost miraculous escape, we left our old friend Courtin, stretched on the ground, bound hand and foot, in utter darkness, between the two wounded bandits.

The gasping of Master Jacques and the groans of Joseph terrified him as much as their threats had done. He trembled lest one of them should happen to remember that he was there too, and should conclude to take vengeance upon him by killing him; he held his breath back lest it should recall him to their thoughts.

Another sentiment, however, was stronger in him than the preservation of his life even; it was his purpose to keep the precious belt, which was still pressed against his heart, out of the hands of those who might be his executioners, until the last moment; and in his desire to hide it from them he ventured upon a step which he would not have dared take to save his life. He let it slip softly down his side, stifling the metallic sound by skilful handling, and with a magnetic instinct, as if his nerves had been put in communication with the gold; and when it reached the ground, he crawled very cautiously toward it until he finally lay on top of it and covered it with his body.

He had just succeeded in executing this difficult manœuvre when he heard the door of the tower creaking on its rusty hinges; he turned his eyes in the direction of the sound, and saw a sort of black ghost, coming

forward with a torch in one hand, and with the other dragging by the bayonet a heavy musket, the butt of which was thumping along the pavement.

Through the shades of death, which were already spreading a film over his eyes, Joseph Picaut saw the apparition, for he cried in a voice tremulous with suffering,—

“The widow! the widow!”

The widow Picaut (for she it was) advanced slowly, and without so much as a glance at the mayor of La Logerie or Master Jacques, who was compressing the wound in his breast with the left hand, and trying to support himself with the right; she stopped in front of her brother-in-law, and gazed at him with an expression in which there was still something threatening.

“A priest! a priest!” cried the dying man, in deadly terror of the gloomy apparition, which awoke a sentiment hitherto quite unknown to him,—remorse.

“A priest! What good can a priest do you, miserable wretch? Can he restore to life your brother whom you murdered?”

“No, no,” cried Picaut, “I did not kill Pascal; I swear by eternity, whither I am ready to go.”

“You did n’t kill him, perhaps, but you allowed his murderers to do it, even if you did n’t urge them on to the crime. Not content with that, you fired at me; and except for the ready hand of a brave man who spoiled your aim, in one evening you would have been twice a fratricide. But be sure of this, that I am not taking my revenge on you now for all the injury you have done me; it is God’s hand falling heavy upon you through mine—Cain!”

“What!” cried Joseph Picaut and Master Jacques in one breath. “That shot—”

"That shot I fired; for I came here, knowing that I should surprise you once more in the commission of a crime. Yes, Joseph, yes, do you, who are so bold, and so proud of your strength, humble yourself before God's decree; you die by the hand of a woman."

"Oh, what matters it to me where the shot came from; as soon as it is certain that I must die, it comes from God. I implore you, woman, to give my repentance time to be of some benefit. Help me to make my peace with the God I have insulted; bring me a priest, I beseech you!"

"Did your brother have a priest in his last hour? Did you give him time to pour out his soul to God, when he fell beneath the blows of your confederates at the ford of the Boulogne? No; eye for eye, tooth for tooth! Die a violent death; die without spiritual or temporal assistance, as your brother died! And may all brigands," she added, turning to Master Jacques,—"may all the brigands, who, in the name of any flag whatsoever, bring ruin and desolation upon their country, and mourning into their homes, go down with you into the deepest depths of hell."

"Woman!" cried Master Jacques, succeeding at last in rising to his feet, "whatever his crime, whatever he has done to you, it is not right for you to speak so. Forgive him rather, that you may yourself be forgiven."

"I?" said the widow; "pray, who dares raise his voice against me?"

"The man whom, without design, you have consigned to the tomb; the man who received the bullet intended for your brother; in short, the man who is speaking to you,—I, whom you shot, and who bear you no grudge for it, by the way; for as things are going now, the best thing men of spirit can do is to go and see if

the tricolored rag, which is evidently the order of the day here on earth, is also in vogue on high."

The widow cried out with wonder and almost with terror at what Master Jacques told her.

As may be divined, after overhearing the plot of the two accomplices, she had watched for Courtin's arrival; and when she saw him go into the tower, she made her way to the platform by the exterior gallery, and thence had fired upon her brother-in-law through the hole in the floor. We have seen how Master Jacques had received the shot, because of his hasty movement to protect Courtin.

This miscarriage of her hatred bewildered the widow a little at first, as we said; but she soon remembered what villains she was dealing with.

"Oh, well, suppose that's true," said she; "even if the bullet intended for one did strike the other, didn't I strike you down just as you were on the point of committing a fresh crime? Didn't I save the life of an innocent man?"

At the last words, a gloomy smile curled the pallid lips of Master Jacques; he turned toward Courtin, and felt for the butt-end of his second pistol.

"Oh, yes," said he, with an evil-sounding laugh, "there is a poor innocent there; I'd forgotten all about him. Since you remind me of the poor fellow, I will deliver him his letters-patent of martyrdom; I don't want to die and leave my work unfinished."

"You won't stain your last hour with blood, as your whole life is stained with it, Master Jacques!" cried the widow, throwing herself between Courtin and the Chouan. "I can find a way to prevent it."

She pointed her bayonet at him as she spoke.

"Very well," said he, as if submitting to her desire.

"Presently, if God gives me time and strength, I will tell you about the two villains whom you call innocent. For the moment I leave him his life; but in exchange, and to earn the absolution I just gave you, do you pardon your poor brother. Don't you hear the death-rattle in his throat? In ten minutes it may be too late."

"No, no, never!" replied the widow, sullenly.

Meanwhile, not only the voice, but the death-rattle itself grew fainter and fainter in Picaut's throat, and he continued to use what little strength he had left in entreaties to his sister.

"You must implore God, not me," she said.

"No," replied the dying man, shaking his head, — "no, I don't dare appeal to God while your curse is upon me."

"Then appeal to your brother, and beg him to pardon you."

"Brother!" whispered Joseph, closing his eyes, — "brother! I am going to see him, I am going to stand face to face with him."

He tried to push away with his hand the bleeding spectre which seemed to draw him to itself; and in a voice scarcely audible, and which was only a breath, he murmured, —

"Brother, brother, why do you turn your head away when I pray to you? In the name of our mother, Pascal, let me embrace your knees! Remember the tears we shed together during the childhood which the first Blues made so hard for us. Forgive me for having kept on in the terrible road on which our father started us both. Alas, alas! I did n't know then that we should one day meet as enemies. *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* you don't answer me, Pascal! You still turn your head away! Oh, my poor child, my poor little Louis, whom I shall

never see again," continued the Chouan, "pray to your uncle, pray to him for me! He loved you as his own child; ask him in your dying father's name to allow a repentant sinner to reach God's throne. Oh, brother, brother," he continued, with a joyous inflection that was almost ecstatic, "you do allow yourself to be moved — you forgive — you hold out your hand to the child! My God, my God, now you may take my soul; my brother has forgiven me!"

He fell back upon the ground, from which he had risen by a mighty effort to stretch out his arms to the vision.

Meanwhile the hatred and thirst for revenge which had shone in every line of the widow's countenance were gradually soothed away. When Joseph spoke of the little fellow whom poor Pascal loved as his own child, a tear stole out between her eyelids; finally, when, by the light of her torch, she saw the dying man's face light up, not with an earthly light, but with a sort of celestial brilliancy, she fell herself on her knees, and pressed the wounded man's hand, crying, —

"I believe you, I believe you, Joseph! God opens the eyes of the dying, and discloses to them the depths of his heaven. As Pascal has forgiven you, I forgive you; as he has forgotten, I forget. Yes I forget everything, but the one fact that you were his brother. Pascal's brother, die in peace!"

"Thank you! thank you!" faltered Joseph, whose voice became weaker and weaker, and on whose lips reddish foam began to appear; "thank you! but the wife and the little ones?"

"Your wife is my sister, and your children are my children," said the widow, solemnly. "Die in peace, Joseph!"

The Chouan carried his hand to his forehead as if he were trying to make the sign of the cross; his lips were still muttering words, which doubtless were not meant for human ears, for they were not intelligible.

Then he slowly opened his eyes, held out his arms, and heaved a deep sigh. It was the last.

"Amen!" said Master Jacques.

The widow knelt in prayer by the body for some few moments, marvelling to find that her eyes had so many tears to shed for the man who had caused her to shed so many.

There was a long silence, which evidently bore hard on Master Jacques, for he suddenly cried, —

"*Sacrédié!* one would hardly suspect that there was still one live Christian here. I say one, for I don't call Judases Christians."

The widow started; in presence of the dead she had forgotten the dying.

"I will return to the house and send somebody to look after you," said she.

"*Peste!* don't think of such a thing; if I were to be cured, it would only be for the guillotine, and I prefer a soldier's death, La Picaut, thank you. I'm in a fair way to get that, and I won't let it go."

"Pray, who told you that I would betray you?"

"Why, are n't you a dog of a patriot, and the wife of another? Damnation! the capture of Master Jacques would be well worth the ink used in writing it down in your account, widow!"

"My husband was a patriot, and I imbibed his sentiments, it's true; but I have a horror of traitors and treachery above all things on earth. Not for all the gold in the world would I betray any one, — not even you."

"You have a horror of treachery? Do you hear over there? Oh, well! my game is up."

"Come, Jacques, let me go for help," urged the widow.

"No," replied the outlaw, "this is the end; I feel it and know it. I have made so many of these bullet-holes that I know all about them! In two hours, or three at most, I shall be at rest in the broad moor,—the fair and beautiful moor of the merciful God! But listen to me."

"Speak."

"This fellow here," he continued, designating Courtin with a kick as if he had been an unclean animal,— "this fellow, for a few paltry gold pieces, has sold a head which ought to be holy and sacred to all; not only because it's one of those destined to wear crowns, but because the heart which goes with it is noble, kind, and generous."

"That head," the widow rejoined, "has found shelter under my roof." For in the picture drawn by Master Jacques, she had recognized Petit-Pierre.

"Yes, you saved her once, I know, La Picaut; and it is that which makes you great in my eyes. It is that which suggested to me to make this request of you."

"Well, what do you want done?"

"Come near, and let me whisper in your ear; you alone must hear what I have to say."

The widow passed Courtin and leaned over the wounded man.

• "You must warn the man who is at your house," he said, beneath his breath.

"Whom do you mean?" asked the stupefied widow.

"The man you are hiding in your stable, and go every night to nurse and comfort."

"For Heaven's sake, who told you —"

"Pshaw! do you suppose that you can hide anything from Master Jacques? All that I say is true, La Picaut, and that is why Master Jacques the Chouan, Master Jacques the highwayman, tells you that he would be proud to be one of your relations, despite your harsh way of treating them."

"But the poor fellow is just beginning to mend; he is hardly strong enough to stand upright without holding on to the wall."

"He'll find the strength, never you fear; for he's a man, you know,—a man such as there'll be no more of after we are gone," said the Vendean, with savage pride; "and if he can't walk himself, he'll find ways of making other people walk. Just tell him that he must warn the person at Nantes, and immediately, without losing a second; that he must warn the person *that he knows of*. The other is on the way while we're chattering."

"It shall be done, Master Jacques."

"Oh, if your scoundrel of a Joseph had only spoken sooner," raising his head and trying to stop the blood which was pouring from his breast. "He knew, I'm sure, what these two beggars were planning; but he had them in his power, and he expected to live. Man proposes and God disposes. The money tempted him. By the way, widow, you ought to find it somewhere,—the money, I mean."

"What shall I do with it?"

"Divide it into two equal parts: give one to the orphans whom the war has made, among Blues and Whites alike; that's my share,—the share which was to come to me after the fair. The other is Joseph's; give it to his children."

Courtin sighed in bitter anguish; for these words were uttered loud enough for him to hear them.

"No," said the widow,— "no, it's Judas's gold, and would bring misfortune! No, thank you, I don't want the gold for the poor little ones, innocent as they are."

"You are right; give it all to the poor. The hands which receive alms wash away every stain, even that of crime."

"And what about him?" said the widow, pointing to Courtin but without looking at him.

"He is well bound and trussed, is n't he?"

"He seems to be, at any rate."

"Oh, well, the man over yonder will decide his fate."

"All right."

"By the way, La Picaut, when you go to tell him about this, give him this roll of tobacco. I have no further use for it; but I think it will please him immensely. Oh!" he continued, "I would give my twenty-five thousand francs to be present at the interview between our friend and this skunk; it makes me regret that I've got to die, for it will be an amusing spectacle. But, then, what are a million or two sous!"

"You must n't stay here," said Marianne. "We have a room in the donjon, where I'll take you; there, you can at least see a priest."

"As you please, widow; but, first, be good enough to make sure that our rascal is properly lashed. The bare idea that he could possibly get away before the grand settling up he's going to have here directly, would poison my last moments."

The widow leaned over Courtin.

The cords were drawn so tightly about his arms that they sank into the flesh, which was red and swollen all around them. The farmer's face especially betrayed the

agony he was enduring; it was even more pallid than Master Jacques'.

"No, he can't stir," said Marianne; "I will turn the key in the door, too."

"Yes, and then it won't be very long, after all; you'll go, at once, won't you, mother?"

"Never fear."

"Thank you! But oh, the thanks I offer you don't approach in fervency those you will receive from the man over yonder, I tell you!"

"All right; but let me take you into the donjon, where you can receive such assistance as your condition demands. Confessor and doctor will be dumb, you may depend upon it."

"So be it. It will be a joke, won't it, to see Master Jacques, who has slept on the moss or heather all his life, die in a bed?"

The widow took him in her arms, and carried him into the room we have spoken of, where she laid him upon a little cot which stood there.

Master Jacques, notwithstanding the fearful pain he must have suffered, notwithstanding the gravity of his condition, was still, with death staring him in the face, the same sardonic mocker he had been all his life; his temperament, which was utterly unlike that of his fellow-countrymen, never changed for an instant.

However, in the midst of his sarcasm, which he dealt out impartially to friend and foe alike, he did not cease to beg the widow Picaut to lose no time in doing his errand to Jean Oullier.

Thus urged on by him, the widow took time only to bolt the door of the old stock-room, where she left Courtin a prisoner; she ran across the garden into the inn, and found her old mother terrified to death by the

reports she had heard. Her daughter's absence redoubled the good woman's alarm, and when Marianne came in, she was just beginning to be afraid that she had fallen into some trap set by her brother-in-law.

The widow, without saying a word as to what had taken place, begged her not to allow any one to go to the ruins, and threw her cloak over her shoulders, preparatory to going out.

Just as she had her hand on the latch, there was a soft knock at the door.

Marianne turned to her mother.

"Mother," said she, "if any stranger wants to pass the night at the inn, say that we have no more room. No one must come in here to-night; God's hand is upon the house."

The knocking was repeated.

"Who's there?" demanded the widow, throwing the door open, but barring the entrance with her body.

Bertha appeared on the threshold.

"You sent word to me this morning, madame," said the girl, "that you had an important communication to make to me."

"Ah, you are right," replied the widow; "I had forgotten."

"Just God!" ejaculated Bertha, noticing that Marianne's cloak was stained with great drops of blood; "Can anything have happened to any of my friends? To Mary — my father — Michel!"

Notwithstanding her strong heart and will, this last thought distressed her so deeply that she had to lean against the wall, to keep from falling.

"Don't be alarmed," replied La Picaut; "it was n't anything bad that I wanted to tell you. On the contrary, one of your old friends, whom you thought you

had lost and whom you have wept for, is alive, and wishes to see you."

"Jean Oullier!" cried Bertha, divining, on the instant, whom she meant,—"Jean Oullier! You are speaking of him, aren't you? He is living! Oh, thank Heaven! How happy my father will be! Take me to him, madame, at once,—at once, I implore you."

"That was my intention this morning. But since then many things have happened; and you now have a duty more urgent than that."

"A duty!" echoed Bertha, in amazement. "What is it, pray?"

"To go to Nantes, immediately; for I doubt whether Jean Oullier, in his feeble state, will be able to do what Master Jacques expected of him."

"And what am I to do at Nantes?"

"Say to the man, or woman, whom you call Petit-Pierre, that the secret of her hiding-place has been sold and bought, and that she must quit it as soon as possible. Any place of refuge is more secure than that where she now is. Treachery is in the air; and God grant that you may arrive in time!"

"Betrayed!" cried Bertha,— "betrayed! And by whom?"

"By the same man who once before sent soldiers to my house after her,—by Courtin, the farmer of La Logerie."

"Courtin! You have seen him?"

"Yes," replied Marianne, laconically.

"Oh," cried Bertha, clasping her hands, "might I not see him?"

"Young woman, young woman," said the widow, avoiding a reply to the question, "I, whom the adherents of that woman have made a widow, bid you hasten,

while you, who boast of being one of the faithful, hesitate about going."

"No, no; you are right," said Bertha. "I have no hesitation; and I will go at once."

She actually made as if to leave the room.

"You can't go to Nantes on foot; you will never arrive in time. But there are two horses in the stable. Take whichever one you please, and tell the ostler to saddle him."

"Oh, I'll saddle him myself," said Bertha; "don't worry about that. But tell me what she, whom you are saving now for the second time, can do for you, good widow."

"Tell her to remember what I said to her in my cottage, by the side of the bed, where two men, slain for her, were lying. Tell her that it is a crime to bring discord and war into a country where her very enemies protect her against treachery. Go, mademoiselle, go; and God be with you!"

With these words the widow rushed out of the house, and went first to the curé of Saint Philbert, whom she begged to go to the donjon. Then she hurried across the fields toward her farm as fast as she could go.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RED BREECHES.

FOR twenty-four hours Bertha's anxiety had been immeasurable. Joseph Picaut's revelations had not aroused her suspicions with reference to Courtin alone, but she had begun to be distrustful of Michel himself.

Her memories of the evening preceding the combat at Chêne — the appearance of a man at Mary's window — had never been completely effaced from her mind, which they passed through, from time to time, like a fire-brand, leaving a furrow of pain behind, which Michel's passive demeanor toward her during his convalescence did little to assuage. But when she learned that Courtin, whom she could not suspect of acting without orders, was responsible for the premature departure of the schooner, and, above all, when she returned, terrified, and overflowing with love to La Logerie, but failed to find there him she sought, her jealous suspicions became more violent than ever.

But for an instant she forgot everything else, to fulfil the duty the widow put upon her. In the face of that duty, all other considerations, even those of her love, must stand aside.

So she ran to the stable, without delay, selected the horse which seemed to her most fit to make the distance in good time, gave him a double ration of oats, to give his legs all the elasticity they were capable of, threw upon his back, while he was eating, the sort of pack-

saddle, which was all she could find, and waited, bridle in hand, until he finished his meal.

While she was thus waiting, a sound, well-known in those troublous times, fell upon her ear. It was the regular, rhythmical tramp of a marching troop of soldiers.

At the same moment there was a violent knocking at the inn-door.

Through a small window, which looked out upon a bake-house connected with the kitchen, she could get a glimpse of the soldiers; and from the first words she heard, she gathered that they were in search of a guide.

At this time, nothing was unimportant in Bertha's eyes; for she was anxious for her father's safety, for Michel's, and for Petit-Pierre's, all at once. Therefore she did not want to go away until she knew just what these men were after; and as she was sure of not being recognized in the peasant's costume she was still wearing, she went from the stable, through the bake-house, into the kitchen.

The little troop was in command of a lieutenant.

"What!" he was saying to Mother Champré, "there's not a man in the house, do you say? Not a single one?"

"No, monsieur," replied the old woman. "My daughter is a widow, and the only hired man we have has gone somewhere, apparently; I don't know where."

"Eh! Your daughter is just the one I would have liked to find," said the lieutenant. "If she were here, she would guide us, as she did the famous night of the Saut de Baugé. Or if she could n't assist us herself, she would select some one for us whom we could trust; while with these wretched peasants, whom we force

into the service, and who are half Chouans, there's no comfort in travelling."

"Mistress Picaut is away; but there may be some way of filling her place," said Bertha, coming forward. "Are you going far, messieurs?"

"*Tudieu!* What a pretty girl!" said the young officer, drawing nearer to her. "Take me where you will, my dear child, and the devil take me if I don't follow you!"

Bertha lowered her eyes, twisting the corner of her apron, as a native village maiden might have done.

"If it's not very far from here, messieurs, and the mistress permits, I can go with you. I am well acquainted in the neighborhood."

"Agreed!" said the lieutenant.

"But only on one condition," Bertha continued. "Some one must bring me back here; I should be afraid — all alone on the roads."

"God forgive me if I yield that privilege to anybody else, my fair damsel," said the officer, "even if my good-nature cost me my epaulets. Come, then, do you know Banlœuvre?"

At the name of that farm, which belonged to Michel, and at which she had passed some days with the marquis and Petit-Pierre, Bertha shuddered involuntarily. The perspiration stood on her brow, and her heart beat madly; yet she mastered her emotion.

"Banlœuvre?" she repeated. "No; that isn't hereabouts. Is it a village or a castle, this Banlœuvre?"

"It's a farmhouse."

"A farmhouse! Whose?"

"It belongs to some gentlemen of your neighborhood, no doubt."

"Are you going into camp at Banlœuvre?"

"No; we're going there on an expedition."

"What does that mean, — 'on an expedition'?" asked Bertha.

"Well, upon my word!" said the lieutenant, "here's a pretty girl who seems most anxious to learn."

"It's very natural. If I am to guide you, or find you a guide, to Banlœuvre, I must at least know what you're going there for."

"We are going to put a White through the dye-vats," said the sub-lieutenant, taking part in the conversation, to air his wit, "so that he may come out a Blue."

"Ah," said Bertha, unable to repress an exclamation of alarm.

"*Tudieu!* What's the matter?" the lieutenant asked. "If I had given you the name of the man we're after, I should have said you were in love with him."

"I," said Bertha, summoning all her strength of will, to hide the terror with which her heart was oppressed, — "I, in love with a gentleman?"

"Kings have been known to marry shepherdesses," observed the sub-lieutenant, who seemed to be of a decidedly jocose turn of thought.

"Good!" said the lieutenant. "But look here, upon my word, the shepherdess is going to faint, like any great lady."

"I?" said Bertha, trying to smile, — "I going to faint? Nonsense! That's the fashion in the city, not here."

"It's none the less true that you were as white as your linen, my girl."

"*Dame!* you talk about shooting a man as if it were no more than drawing a rabbit in the corner of a hedge."

"Whereas there's a very great difference between the two," chimed in the sub-lieutenant. "A dead rabbit is good to roast, while a dead Chouan is good for nothing."

Bertha could not prevent her proud, expressive features from betraying the disgust which the young officer's pleasantry aroused in her.

"Ah, çà!" said the lieutenant, "you're not a patriot, then, like your mistress; and we were not well-informed."

"I am a patriot; but no matter how bitterly I hate my enemies, I have not succeeded yet in getting so that I can look on at their death with dry eyes."

"Bah!" said the officer, "it's their own fault! It's their own fault if they pass the nights on the high-roads instead of in their beds. Just now, when that cursed peasant arrived at the post at Saint Martin, and I had to take the road, I sent the State to all the devils. But I see now that I was wrong, and that it has its compensations; so that at this moment I think my profession a charming one, instead of cursing it."

As he concluded this speech, the officer, for the purpose of adding to the attractions of the occasion, no doubt, leaned forward, and tried to imprint a kiss on the girl's neck.

Bertha, who was not anticipating that lover-like aggression, felt the young man's breath on her face, and drew herself up, red as a pomegranate, her nostrils quivering with rage, and her eyes blazing.

"Oho!" exclaimed the lieutenant; "you're not going to lose your temper over a paltry kiss, are you, my dear?"

"Why not? Pray, do you think that because I am a poor country girl you can insult me with impunity?"

"'Insult you with impunity!' Phew! how she

talks!" said the sub-lieutenant. "And yet, they say we're in a land of savages!"

"Do you know," said the lieutenant, "that there's something I have a great mind to do?"

"What is it?"

"Arrest you as a suspicious person, and not set you at liberty till you have paid the ransom I fix."

"What will the ransom be?"

"What you just refused me, — a kiss."

"I can't let you take a kiss, for you are neither my father nor my brother nor my husband."

"Are they the only ones, pray, who will ever have the right to lay their lips on your lovely cheeks?"

"Of course!"

"For what reason?"

"Because I don't choose to fall short of my duties."

"Your duties! Oh, that's a good one!"

"Don't you suppose that we have our duties, just as you have yours? Come [Bertha tried to laugh], suppose I should ask you the name of the man you propose to arrest, and it was contrary to your duty to tell me, would you do it?"

"Faith!" said the young officer, "I should deserve no great credit for telling you, because I don't think there's the slightest reason why you should n't know."

"But suppose there was such a reason, how would it be?"

"Oh, in that case — And yet, I don't know, on my soul! Your eyes go to my brain, so that I don't dare to say certainly what I would do. Come, now, to prove it, — if you absolutely must know it, if you are as curious as I am weak, — why, I'll tell you the name; yes, I will betray my country, even. But then, I must have the kiss, you know!"

Bertha's anxiety was so keen, she felt so sure that it was Michel who was in danger, that she forgot to be even ordinarily prudent; and with characteristic impetuosity, and without considering what suspicions her persistence might arouse in the lieutenant's mind, she suddenly offered him her cheek.

He executed two resounding smacks.

"A bargain's a bargain," said he, unable to repress a smile. "The name of the man we are going to arrest is M. de Vinc  ."

Bertha drew back and looked him in the face. She had a presentiment that he had made a fool of her and deceived her.

"Well, we must be off!" said the lieutenant. "We will go to the mayor, and seek what we can't find here."

"Ah," he continued, turning to Bertha, "whoever the guide is he gives me, it won't be any one who will please me as you do, my pretty child!" with a sigh that was largely affected.

Then he shouted to his soldiers, —

"Come, you fellows, *en route!*"

The sub-lieutenant and the few soldiers who had entered the house with their officer went out, and the troop formed again in marching order.

The lieutenant asked for a light for his cigar. Bertha sought vainly for one under the frame of the chimney-piece. He then took a paper from his pocket, and lighted it at the lamp. Bertha, who was following his every movement, glanced at this paper, which was beginning to twist and curl up in the flame; and on one of its folds she distinctly saw the name of Michel.

"Ah, I suspected as much," she thought; "he lied to me. Yes, yes; it's Michel that they're after!"

As the officer had thrown the paper on the floor half-burned, she put her foot upon it, with so much embarrassment that he took advantage of it to kiss her again.

As she was turning upon him, he said, putting a finger to his lips, —

“Hush! you are not a peasant. Look out for yourself, if you have anything to hide; for if you play your part as badly with those who happen to be looking for you as with me, who have no such mission, you are lost!”

With that, he went quickly from the house, fearing, doubtless, lest he might be lost himself.

Bertha hardly waited till the door had closed behind him before she pounced upon the remnants of the paper.

It was the denunciation which Courtin had sent to Nantes by the peasant, and which the latter, to shorten his journey, had delivered at the first post he came to on the road, — which was at Saint Martin, the next village to Saint Philbert.

Enough of the mayor's missive was unburned to enlighten Bertha as to the errand of the little troop which was marching upon Banlœuvre.

Her brain was in a whirl. If the sentence which hung over the young man's head was executed by the soldiers, — and the sub-lieutenant's jokes made her think it possible, — Michel would be a dead man within two hours. She seemed to see him, his breast pierced with bullets, reddening the earth with his blood. She became almost mad.

“Where is Jean Oullier?” she shrieked at the old landlady.

“Jean Oullier?” said she, looking at Bertha in utter bewilderment. “I don't know what you mean.”

"I ask you where Jean Oullier is."

"Is n't Jean Oullier dead?"

"Well, where has your daughter gone?"

"*Dame!* I have no idea. She does n't tell me where she's going when she goes out; she's old enough to be her own mistress."

Bertha thought of the Picaut house. But to go there, if it turned out to be useless, would waste an hour; and that hour would be sufficient for Michel to lose his life.

"She will return very soon," said she. "Tell her that I was n't able to go to the place she knows of, right away, but that I will be there before daybreak."

Thereupon she ran to the stable, put the bridle on the horse, jumped upon his back, and rode him out into the yard. Then, with a few smart blows on his flanks, she succeeded in urging him at once into a gait which was neither trot nor gallop, but which would, nevertheless, take her to Banlœuvre half an hour faster than the soldiers could walk it.

As she rode through the square of Saint Philbert, she could hear, on her right, in the direction of the bridge, the tread of the little troop as it continued its march.

She rapidly laid her plans, took a lane which ran behind the houses, swam her horse across the Boulogne, and came out on the road again, a little above Machecoul forest.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WOUNDED SHE-WOLF.

LUCKILY for Bertha, her mount had more bottom than his appearance gave promise of. He was a little Breton horse, and when at rest, seemed low-spirited, gloomy, and despondent, like the men of his province; but — in this also like them — he warmed up in action, and became more energetic from minute to minute. With wide-open nostrils, and his long mane flying in the wind, he broke at last into a gallop, which soon became a headlong rush, fairly devouring space; plains, valleys, hedges passed by and disappeared behind him with magic swiftness, while Bertha, leaning forward on his neck, and giving him free rein, thought of nothing but urging him on, and plied her whip on his sides without respite.

The belated peasants whom they fell in with, seeing the horse and his rider vanish in the darkness as soon as they appeared, took them for phantoms, and crossed themselves.

But swift as their pace was, it did not content Bertha's heart, to which each second seemed a month, each minute a year. She realized what a terrible responsibility rested upon her head,—of preventing blood-shed, death, and shame, all three. Should she succeed in saving Michel? And having saved him, should she reach Nantes in time to avert the danger which threatened Petit-Pierre?

A thousand confused thoughts thronged her brain. She blamed herself for neglecting to give Marianne's mother sufficient instructions; it made her sick to think that after the terrible race she was giving him, the poor little Breton beast would inevitably give out on the way from Baulœuvre to Nantes. She blamed herself for wasting, in the interest of her passion, resources which might have assured the safety of a head so precious to the nobility of France. She realized that, as nobody but herself knew the pass-words, nobody else could reach the illustrious proscribed; and, struggling thus with a thousand inconsistent feelings, the distracted victim of a sort of drunken frenzy, she retained just consciousness enough to dig her heels into the horse, and keep him up to the mad pace which, if it did nothing else, at least brought some soothing coolness to her brain, burning with the thoughts which seemed to be almost bursting it.

In an hour she reached Touvois forest. There, she was forced to relax her gait, for the road was so boggy and holes so frequent that the poor little beast fell down twice. She let him walk, calculating that she had a sufficient lead to give Michel time to fly.

She hoped — she breathed again.

One moment of contentment soothed her devouring anguish and sorrow.

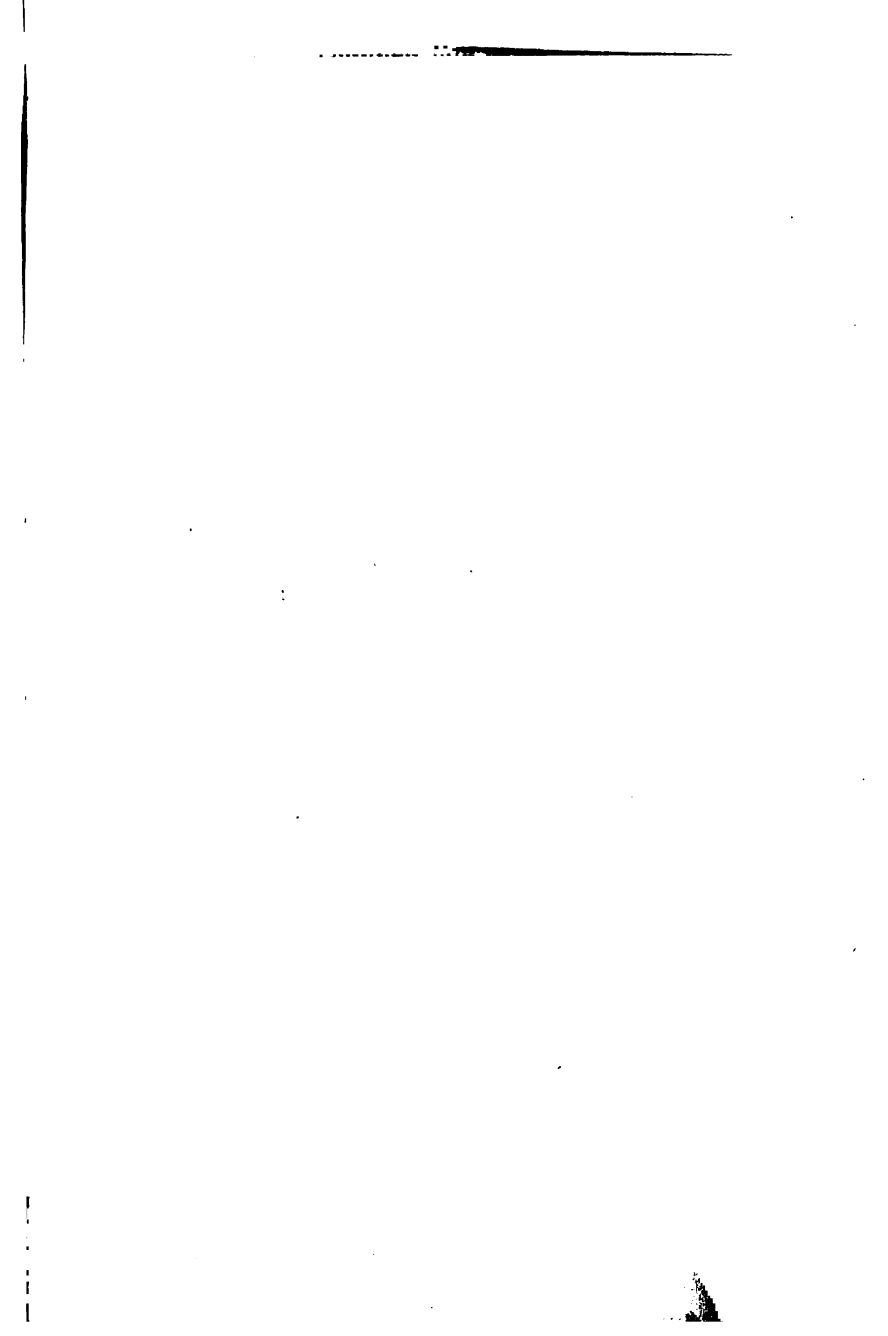
Once more Michel was to owe his life to her.

One must have loved, must have tasted the ineffable joys of self-sacrifice, must know by experience how much pure happiness there is in the immolation of one's self for the sake of one's beloved, to understand how proud and joyful Bertha felt for a few moments, as she thought that Michel's life, which she was going to save, would perhaps cost her so dear.

She was completely absorbed in such thoughts when

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THE WOUNDED SHE-WOLF.

Drawn by E. Van Muyden.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL, II. 395.

she saw the white walls of the farmhouse, framed by the dark verdure of the hazels, shining in the moon's rays.

The gate across the cart-path was open. Bertha alighted from her horse, tied him to one of the rings set in the wall, and walked into the yard.

The manure with which it was strewn deadened the sound of her footfalls; no dog by his barking gave notice of her approach to the occupants of the farmhouse.

To her great surprise she saw a horse all saddled and bridled tied at the door. It might be Michel's, but it also might well belong to a stranger, and Bertha thought best to clear up that point before entering the house.

One of the shutters of the same room in which Petit-Pierre, in Michel's name, had asked the Marquis de Souday for his daughter's hand, was half open. Bertha softly approached, and looked in.

No sooner had she cast her eyes into the room than she gave a stifled cry, and nearly fell to the ground.

She saw Michel at Mary's knees; one of his arms was around her sister's waist; her hand was playing in his hair; their lips were wreathed in smiles, their eyes beaming with that blissful expression which one can never mistake the meaning of when one has once known what it is to love.

The bewilderment which followed this discovery lasted only a second. She rushed to the door, threw it open violently, and appeared on the threshold, with hair flying, flaming eye, livid countenance, and heaving breast, like the personification of Vengeance.

Mary shrieked, and fell on her knees with her face in her hands.

She divined everything at the first glance from Bertha's extreme agitation.

Michel, terrified by Bertha's appearance, had risen

quickly to his feet, and put his hand to his sword, as if he suddenly found himself in presence of a foe.

"Strike!" cried Bertha, whom his movement did not escape. "Pray, strike, wretched man! It will be the fitting complement of your cowardice and your treachery."

"Bertha,— " faltered Michel, "let me tell you— let me explain —"

"To your knees! to your knees! you and your accomplice!" cried Bertha. "On your knees you must pronounce the hateful lies you propose to invent in your own defence. Oh, infamous! and I was hurrying here to save his life! I, who, because I was half mad with terror and despair on account of the perils which threatened him, forgot everything,— honor, duty, all! I, who lay my life at his feet, and who had but one aim, one desire, one longing,— to say to him, 'Look, Michel, look at this, and see if I love you!' I come here, and I find him breaking all his oaths, false to all his promises, unfaithful to the sacred obligations, I will not say of love, but of gratitude! And with whom? and for whom? For the being whom I loved most in the world after him! for the companion of my childhood! for my sister! Pray was there no other woman to seduce? Speak, speak, miserable wretch!" she went on, seizing Michel's arm and shaking it violently. "Or was it that you wished, when you left me in despair, to take away the consolation which I otherwise might find in the heart of that second self whom I called sister?"

"Bertha, listen to me," pleaded Michel, "listen to me, I implore you! We are not, God knows, as blameworthy as you think. Oh, if you knew, Bertha!"

"I will listen to nothing! I will listen only to my heart, broken by grief, torn by despair! I will listen

only to the voice of my conscience, which tells me that you are a coward! *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" she cried, tearing her hair with her clinched hands, "*Mon Dieu!* is this, then, the reward of my fondness for him,—the fondness which was so blind and deaf that my eyes closed and my ears were stopped when they told me that this child, this trembling, timid, hesitating Miss Nancy was not worthy of my love? Oh, poor fool that I was! I hoped that gratitude would bind him to the woman who took pity on his weakness, who defied prejudice and public opinion to seek him out in his mire, and to make of his sullied name an honorable and honored one!"

"Oh," cried Michel, drawing himself up, "enough! enough!"

"Yes, of a sullied name!" Bertha persisted. "Aha! does that touch you? So much the better! I'll say it again, then. Yes, of a name sullied by that which is the most hateful, the most cowardly, the most infamous of all crimes,—by treachery! Oh, family of traitors! the son continues the father's work; I ought to have expected it."

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle," Michel interposed, "you abuse the privilege of your sex, to insult me not only in my own person, but in that which man holds most sacred,—the memory of my father."

"Sex! sex! Have I any sex now? Ah, I had none a moment ago when you were making sport of me at the feet of that poor fool! I had none when you were making her sister the most wretched of creatures! And because I don't whine, because I don't crawl at your feet, tearing my hair and beating my breast, behold, you suddenly discover that I am a woman,—a being whom you must respect because she is timid, who must

not be grieved because she is weak! No, no! in your eyes I had then, and I have now, no sex; you have before you now, from this moment, only a creature whom you have mortally insulted, and who insults you in her turn! Baron de la Logerie, I have already said that he is a hundred times a traitor and coward who seduces the sister of his fiancée,—for I really was that fellow's fiancée! Baron de la Logerie, not only are you a traitor and a coward, you are the son of a traitor and a coward as well; your father was an infamous scoundrel, who sold and betrayed Charette, and who, at least, expiated his crime, for he paid for it with his life! You have been told that he killed himself while hunting, or that he was killed by accident,—a well-meant falsehood, which I now set right. He was killed by the man who saw him carry out his foul bargain; he was killed by —”

“Sister!” cried Mary jumping to her feet, and putting her hand on Bertha's mouth, “sister, you almost committed one of the crimes which you blame most in others; you were going to tell a secret which does n't belong to you.”

“Very well; but let him speak then, this block! Let the contempt which I exhibit for him make him raise his head! Let him find somewhere, in his pride or in his shame, the courage to relieve me of an existence, of which I want no more, which is odious, which will never henceforth be aught but one long nightmare,—an everlasting despair; let him at least finish what he has begun! *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,*” she continued, as the tears began to force their way into her eyes, “how can you permit men thus to shatter the hearts of your creatures? *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,* who will comfort me henceforth?”

“I,” said Mary,—“I, my sister, my dear good sister! if you will listen to me; I, if you will forgive me!”

"Forgive, you — *you!*" cried Bertha, pushing her sister away. "No; you are that man's confederate; I know you no more! But watch well over one another; for your treachery ought to bring misfortune upon both."

"Bertha, Bertha, in Heaven's name, don't speak so! Don't curse us, don't insult us!"

"Bah!" said Bertha, "do you take it that way? May not they be right, after all, who gave us the name of She-wolves? Would you like to have people say, 'Mesdemoiselles de Souday loved M. Michel de la Logerie; they both loved him. And after he had promised marriage to both of them,' — for I suppose he has promised to marry you, as he did me — 'M. de la Logerie chose a third party.' You must realize that that would be monstrous, even for She-wolves!"

"Bertha, Bertha!"

"If I scorned that sobriquet as I scorned the paltry condescension of superficial respectability," continued the poor girl, with undiminished excitement, "if I scoffed at the strait-laced propriety of the salons and society in general, it was because both of us — mark that — because both of us had the right to walk with heads proudly erect in our virtuous and honorable independence; it was because we were so serene in our consciousness of innocence that these wretched insults were always dominated by our contempt. But to-day, I declare to you that I do for you what I disdained to do for myself; I will kill that man if he doesn't marry you, Mary! It's quite enough shame on our father's name."

"That name shall never be dishonored, Bertha, I swear it!" cried Mary, kneeling again before her sister, who, yielding at last to her emotion, had fallen into a chair, and was holding her head in her hands.

"So much the better; it will make one sorrow less for her whom you will never see more. *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" she cried, waving her arms despairingly, "to have loved them both so dearly, and to be compelled to hate them!"

"No, you won't hate me, Bertha! Your grief and your tears hurt me more deeply than your anger; forgive me. Oh, *mon Dieu!* what am I saying? You will think me guilty because I embrace your knees, because I beg you to forgive me. But I am not, I swear! I will tell you, but I don't want you to suffer. I don't want to see you weep. Monsieur de la Logerie," Mary continued, turning her face, bathed in tears, to Michel, — "Monsieur de la Logerie, the past has been only a dream, and the morning has come. Go! leave us, and forget me! Go at once!"

"Why, you can't mean it, Mary," said Bertha, who had let her sister take her hand, which she was covering with kisses and tears; "why, it's impossible!"

"Oh, yes, it is possible, Bertha," said Mary, with a heart-breaking smile. "We will each take a spouse whose name will set all the slanders of all the evil tongues in the world at defiance."

"Whom do you mean, poor dear?"

"God Almighty!" said Mary, raising her hand toward heaven.

Bertha could not reply, — grief choked her utterance, — but she strained Mary to her heart; while Michel, completely overcome, fell, rather than sat, upon a stool in a corner of the room.

"But forgive us," Mary whispered in her sister's ear; "don't be so hard on him. *Mon Dieu!* is it his fault that his education has made him so irresolute and timid that he lacked courage to speak when it was his duty to

do so? He has long wanted to tell you, but I alone prevented him; for I hoped some day to be able to forget him. Alas, alas! God has made us very weak against our own hearts. But now we will never part again, dear sister. Show me your eyes, that I may kiss them. No one shall ever again come between us — ever again sow discord and misery between two loving sisters. No, no, we will be henceforth alone in our love for each other,—alone with God, to whom we will devote our lives; and there will be happiness for us in our retirement. We shall find happiness in praying for him, — in praying for him.”

Mary uttered these last words in a heart-rending tone. Michel meanwhile had come, in his anguish, and knelt beside her, before Bertha, who, being entirely occupied with her sister, did not repel him.

At this moment soldiers appeared at the door which Bertha had left wide open, and the same officer whom we met recently at the Saint Philbert inn came forward into the middle of the room, and laid his hand on Michel's shoulder.

“You are M. Michel de la Logerie?” said he.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“I arrest you then, in the king's name.”

“Great God!” cried Bertha, returning to her senses.

“Great God, I had forgotten! Ah, I am his murderess! And over yonder, too, — over yonder, what is happening there?”

“Michel, Michel!” exclaimed Mary, forgetting, when she saw the peril of her lover, all that she had said to her sister,—“Michel, if you die, I will die with you!”

“No, no, he shall not die, sister, I swear it; and you shall yet be happy! Stand back, monsieur, back!” said she to the officer.

"Mademoiselle." replied that personage, with sorrowful politeness, "like you, I can not trifle with my duties. At Saint Philbert you were nought but a suspicious stranger, and I, as I am not a police agent, had nothing to say to you; here, I find you in open rebellion against the law, and I arrest you."

"Arrest me! arrest me now! You may kill me, monsieur; you shall not take me alive."

And before the officer recovered from his surprise, Bertha had leaped through the window into the yard, and was running toward the gate, which was guarded by soldiers.

Looking swiftly around, she saw Michel's horse running to and fro in the yard, terrified by the appearance of the soldiers and the noise.

Profiting by the officer's reliance upon the precaution he had taken of surrounding the house, which would render unnecessary laying violent hands upon a woman, she ran to the animal, leaped into the saddle with a single movement, and passing the stupefied officer like a whirlwind, rode straight for a spot where the wall was partially torn down, and urged the horse so strenuously with rein and heel (it was an excellent English beast) that she lifted him over the obstacle, which was still nearly five feet high, and galloped off into the fields.

"Don't fire! don't fire at her!" cried the officer, who did not consider her capture of sufficient importance to make it advisable to have her corpse, if he could not take her alive.

But the soldiers who formed a cordon around the outer wall either failed to hear or to understand the order, and a hailstorm of bullets whistled around Bertha, as the powerful stride of the willing steed bore her rapidly away toward Nantes.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SLAB IN THE FIREPLACE.

Now let us see what was taking place at Nantes during the night which opened with the death of Joseph Picaut, and continued with the arrest of M. Michel de la Logerie.

About nine in the evening, a man whose cloths were drenched with water and stained with mud, presented himself at the prefect's house, and upon the usher's refusal to admit him to the magistrate's presence, sent in a card which seemed to have a magic power, for the prefect immediately laid aside his other business to receive this individual, who was no other than M. Hyacinthe.

Ten minutes after this interview terminated, a strong detachment of gendarmes and police agents proceeded to the house occupied by Master Pascal, on Rue du Marché, and made its appearance at the door opening upon that street.

No precaution was taken to deaden the noise of their march, or to put any body on the wrong scent as to their intentions; so that Master Pascal, who saw them coming, had plenty of time to make sure that the gate opening on the lane was not watched, and to go out that way, before the officers of the law had finished breaking in the Rue du Marché door, which was not opened at their summons.

He went straight to Rue du Château, and entered the door of number three.

M. Hyacinthe, whom he had not seen, as he was hidden behind a post, followed him with all the precau-

tion with which the hunter stalks the keen-scented and timorous deer.

During this preliminary proceeding, for the success of which M. Hyacinthe had probably made himself responsible, the authorities had made strong preparations for action; and as soon as the Jew reported what he had seen to the prefect of Loire-Inférieure, twelve hundred men marched to the house which the spy had seen Master Pascal enter.

These twelve hundred men were split into three bodies.

The first descended the Cours, leaving sentinels at intervals along the garden-walls of the bishop's palace and the adjoining houses, skirted the moats of the château, and arrived opposite number three, where it drew up in line of battle.

The second, going by Rue de l'Évêché, crossed the Place Saint Pierre, descended the main street, and effected a junction with the first through the lower Rue du Château.

The third joined the other two through the upper Rue du Château, leaving a long line of bayonets in its wake.

The investment was complete, and the whole block of houses which included number three was surrounded.

The soldiers entered the ground-floor, preceded by commissaries of police, pistol in hand. The troop scattered over the house, and left men at every possible place of egress; its mission was accomplished, and that of the police began.

Four ladies were, to all appearance, the only occupants of the house; they belonged to the highest Nantaise aristocracy, and were venerable alike by their honorable character and their social position. They were placed under arrest.

Outside, the people gathered in large numbers, and formed a second cordon around the troops. The whole town was out in the squares and streets. Yet no sign of Royalist sympathies was manifested: there was sober curiosity, nothing more.

The search was begun within, and the first result tended to confirm the authorities in their conviction that Madame la Duchesse de Berry was in the house: a letter addressed to her was found lying open on a table. The disappearance of Master Pascal, who had been seen to enter the house, but could not be found, proved that there must be a hiding-place. The only thing was to find it.

The furniture was opened when the keys were at hand, and broken in when they were missing. Sappers and masons sounded the floors and walls with heavy blows of the hammer; architects were taken into every room, and declared it to be impossible, comparing their outer and inner conformation, that there should be any lurking-places in the walls, or found them where they did exist. In one of them they put their hands upon certain documents, also jewelry and plate belonging to the owner of the house, but which, being found in that place, added to their certainty that the princesse was somewhere in the house. At last they reached the garrets; and there the architects declared that there was less possibility of any secret hole than anywhere else.

Then they visited the neighboring houses, and pursued their investigations there. They sounded the walls with such violence as to detach pieces of masonry, and for a moment there was danger that the walls would fall altogether. While these things were going on in the upper stories, the ladies who were under arrest exhibited the greatest *sang-froid*; and although they were kept in sight by the soldiers, they sat down to eat.

Two other females — and history ought to seek out their names in their obscurity, to hand them down to posterity — were also made the objects of special watchfulness on the part of the police. These were two house-servants, named Charlotte Moreau and Marie Boissy. They were taken to the castle, and thence to the barracks of the gendarmerie, where an attempt was made to bribe them, as they resisted all threats. Sums increasing in magnitude were offered first to one, and then to the other; but they persistently replied that they knew nothing of the whereabouts of Madame la Duchesse de Berry.

After these fruitless investigations the search became somewhat less active; the prefect gave the order to withdraw, taking the precaution to leave men enough behind to occupy every room together with the commissaries of police, who took up their quarters on the ground-floor. The cordon was maintained around the house, and the National Guard relieved a part of the troops of the Line, who went to get a little rest.

In the distribution of sentinels, two gendarmes were posted in the two attics which had been recently explored. It was so cold that they could not endure it; one of them went down-stairs and returned with some peat, and in ten minutes a magnificent fire was blazing on the hearth, and in fifteen, the slab became red-hot.

About the same time, although it was not yet daylight, the exploring workmen began their work again; iron bars and joists thundered against the walls of the garret, and made them tremble.

Despite this fearful uproar, one of the gendarmes had gone to sleep; his companion, feeling a bit warmer, had ceased to stir the fire. At last the workmen aban-

doned that part of the house which, with the workman's passion for tearing down, they had examined so minutely.

The gendarme whose eyes were open, desiring to take advantage of the momentary quiet which followed the diabolical confusion of the night, shook his comrade so that he might take his turn at sleeping. The other had grown cold again in his sleep, and awoke nearly frozen. His eyes were barely open before he began to think about warming himself, and he consequently rekindled the fire. As the peat did not burn briskly enough, he threw on a vast quantity of bundles of the "*Quotidienne*," which lay heaped pell-mell under a table.

The fire produced by these journals made a much thicker smoke and fiercer heat than the peat had done before. The delighted gendarme was whiling away the time reading the "*Quotidienne*," when suddenly his edifice of fire was overturned and the pieces of peat he had leaned against the slab at the back of the fireplace rolled out into the middle of the room.

At the same time he heard a noise behind the slab, which suggested a curious idea to him: he imagined that there were rats in the fireplace, and that the heat was driving them out; so he aroused his comrade, and they both stood ready to chase them with their swords when they appeared.

While their attention was thus absorbed by this novel ambushade, one of them noticed that the slab moved.

"Who's there?" he cried.

A woman's voice replied, —

"We surrender, we are coming out; put out the fire!"

The gendarmes at once pounced upon the blazing mass, and scattered it, and trampled out the fire with their feet.

The slab in the fireplace turned upon its axis, and disclosed a gaping hole, and in the hole the pale face of a woman, whose head was bare, whose hair stood up straight from her forehead like a man's. She was dressed in an unpretentious brown *robe de Napolitaine*, burned in many places. She came forth from the opening, crawling across the glowing hearth on her hands and feet.

This woman was Petit-Pierre. It was her royal Highness Madame la Duchesse de Berry.

Her companions followed her. Sixteen hours they had been shut up there without food or drink.

The hole which had sheltered them lay between the flue and the wall of the next house, under the roof, the rafters of which served to cover it.

While the troops were in motion to surround the house, her royal Highness was intently listening to Master Pascal, gleefully describing the alarm which drove him from his house. Through the windows of the room in which she was sitting, the duchesse could see the moon rising in a clear sky, and the massive, silent, immovable towers of the old château stand out against its light like a frowning shadow.

There are moments when Nature seems so gentle and kind that one cannot believe that danger is watching and threatening us in the midst of such calm and peace.

But suddenly Master Pascal, approaching the window, saw the gleam of bayonets. On the instant he darted back, crying,—

“Fly, madame! fly!”

Madame at once rushed to the stairway, and every one followed her.

When she reached the hiding-place, she called her

companions. As they realized that the only distinction to be taken into account there was the difference in size, the men who accompanied her royal Highness went in first. Then, as the young woman who was in the party objected to taking precedence of Madame, the latter said, laughingly, —

“It’s good strategy when an army is in retreat for the commanding officer to bring up the rear.”

The soldiers were opening the street-door, just as the opening into the hole was closed.

We have seen with what painstaking minuteness the search was carried on. Every blow struck on the wall was distinctly heard by the duchesse and her companions. Bricks were loosened, too, and the plaster fell in clouds beneath the blows of the hammers, the iron bars, and the heavy timbers; and the prisoners were in great danger of being buried under the ruins.

When the gendarmes lighted their fire the slab and the walls of the fireplace became heated, and made the air in the little retreat hotter and hotter, with every moment. It became harder and harder to breathe; and they who were confined there would surely have died of asphyxiation and suffocation, had they not succeeded in loosening some slates in the roof and letting in a little fresh air.

The duchesse suffered most. As she was the last to go in, she was forced to stand directly against the slab. Each of her companions offered, over and over again, to change places with her, but she persistently refused to do so.

A new danger — that of being burned alive — was added to the danger of asphyxiation. The slab was red-hot, and the clothing of the women threatened to take fire. Twice, indeed, Madame’s dress did break into a

blaze; and she put it out with her bare hands, at the cost of two burns, of which she bore the marks many a day.

Every minute the air in the hole grew rarer, and the outer air came in through the holes in the roof in insufficient quantity to make matters much better. The prisoners' breath came in shorter gasps. To remain ten minutes longer in that furnace was to endanger the life of the duchesse. Each one in turn implored her to go out; she alone did not want to do it. Her eyes shed great angry tears, which the hot air dried on her cheeks. Once more her dress caught fire; once more she put it out. But as she rose to do it, she moved the catch which held the slab in place, so that it opened half way, and attracted the notice of the gendarmes.

Supposing that this mishap had betrayed their hiding-place, and taking pity on her suffering companions, Madame then consented to give herself up, and emerged from the fireplace in the manner we have narrated.

Her first words were a demand to see Dermoncourt. One of the gendarmes went after him down to the ground-floor, where he had chosen to remain.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THREE BROKEN HEARTS.

As soon as the general's arrival was announced to her, Madame rushed to meet him.

"General," said she, eagerly, "I surrender to you, and rely upon your loyalty."

"Madame," was Dermoncourt's reply, "your royal Highness is under the safeguard of the honor of France."

He led her to a chair; and as she sat down, she said to him, pressing his arm, —

"General, I have nothing to reproach myself for. I only fulfilled my duty as a mother, in trying to regain her son's heritage for him."

She spoke quickly and sharply. Although pale, she was as excited as if she had a fever. The general sent for a glass of water, in which she dipped her fingers; and she seemed somewhat soothed thereby.

Meanwhile the prefect and the commanding officer of the division had been notified of what had happened.

The prefect was the first to make his appearance. He entered the room where Madame was with his hat on, as if there were not there a woman a prisoner who, by virtue of her rank and her misfortunes, deserved more consideration than she had ever received. He approached the duchesse, and stared at her, touching his hat cavalierly. Barely lifting it from his head, he said, —

"Ah, yes; it's she, and no mistake!"

He went out to give his orders.

"Who is that man?" the duchesse inquired.

It was a natural question, for the prefect appeared without any of the distinctive marks of his high administrative office.

"Can Madame not guess?" the general replied.

She looked at him, smiling slightly.

"It must be the prefect," said she.

"Madame could not have made a better guess if she had seen his commission."

"Did that man serve under the Restoration?"

"No, madame."

"I congratulate the Restoration."

At this moment the prefect returned. As before, he did not send to announce his coming; as before, he hardly lifted his hat. On this occasion he was apparently hungry, for he carried a piece of pie on a plate in his hand. He put the plate on a table, called for knife and fork, and began to eat, with his back turned to the duchesse.

She looked at him with an expression in which anger and contempt strove for the mastery.

"General," she cried, "do you know what I regret most, of all the privileges of my former position?"

"No, madame."

"The right to call two ushers, to teach Monsieur good manners."

When the prefect had concluded his repast, he turned to the duchesse and demanded her papers.

She told him to look in the hiding-place, where he would find a white portfolio she had left there.

He did as she suggested, and returned with the portfolio.

"Monsieur," said she, opening it, "the papers this portfolio contains are of small importance; but I

prefer to hand them to you myself, so as to explain them."

She handed him, one after another, everything there was in it.

"Does Madame know how much money she has?" the prefect asked.

"Monsieur, there should be about thirty-six thousand francs, twelve thousand of which belong to the persons whom I will name."

The general then approached Madame, and said to her that if she felt a little better, it was important that she should leave the house.

"To go where?" said she, looking earnestly at him.

"To the castle, madame."

"Ah, indeed! And thence to Blaye, of course?"

"General," said one of her companions, "her royal Highness cannot go on foot. It would not be decent."

"Monsieur," rejoined Dermoncourt, "a carriage would only hinder us. Madame can walk, if she throws a cloak over her shoulders and puts on a hat."

Thereupon the general's secretary and the prefect, who prided himself on his gallantry this time, went down to the second floor and brought back three hats. The duchesse selected a black one because, as she said, its color best befitted the occasion. After which she took the general's arm; and as they passed the door of the garret, she cast a last glance at the slab in the fireplace, which had been left open.

"Ah, general," said she, with a laugh, "if you had n't made war on me *à la Saint Laurent*, — which, by the way, is below the standard of military courtesy, — you would not have me on your arm at this moment. Come, my friends!" she added, addressing her companions.

The duchesse went down to the ground-floor, and was just about to pass through the street-door, when she heard a great noise among the populace, who were packed in behind the soldiers, and formed a mass ten-fold more dense than their ranks.

She might well think that the shouts were meant for her; but she gave no other sign of fear than to press the general's arm a little tighter. When she walked along between the double lines of troops and National Guards, who lined the streets from the house to the castle, the shouts and mutterings she had heard began again, more threatening, and louder than before.

The general glanced in the direction where the uproar seemed mainly to be. He perceived a young girl, in peasant garb, trying to force a passage through the ranks of the soldiers, who, impressed by her beauty and the despair depicted on her features, were simply obeying their instructions in keeping her back, without taking harsh measures to thrust her aside.

Dermoncourt recognized Bertha, and pointed her out to the princesse with his finger. She uttered a cry of dismay.

"General," said she, earnestly, "you promised not to separate me from any of my friends. Let that girl come to me."

At a sign from the general the ranks opened, and Bertha was enabled to reach the side of the august captive.

"Pardon, madame!" she cried. "Pardon for a wretched creature who might have saved you and failed to do it! Oh, that I might die, cursing the fatal passion which has made me the involuntary accomplice of the traitors who sold your royal Highness!"

"I don't know what you mean, Bertha," interposed

the duchesse, lifting her up and giving her the arm which was free. "What you are doing now sufficiently proves that, whatever has happened, I have nothing with which to reproach a devotion which I shall never forget. But I had something else to talk to you about, my child. I have to ask your forgiveness for having contributed to an error which, perhaps, may cause you unhappiness. I have to tell you —"

"I know all, madame," said Bertha, raising to Madame's face eyes all inflamed with weeping.

"Poor child!" exclaimed the duchesse, pressing the maiden's hand. "Well, you shall come with me, then. Time, and my affection for you, will assuage the sorrow which I can imagine, and which I respect."

"I ask your Highness's pardon for my inability to obey you; but I have made a vow, and I must fulfil it. God is the only one whom duty, as I see it, places above my princes."

"Go, then, dear child, go!" said Madame, who understood what her purpose was; "and may the God of whom you speak be with you! When you call upon him, do not forget Petit-Pierre. God welcomes the prayers of broken hearts."

They had reached the gates of the donjon of the castle. The duchesse looked up at its grim black walls; then she held out her hand to Bertha, who knelt and pressed a kiss upon it, still murmuring the word, "Pardon." Madame, after a moment's hesitation, passed through the postern, with a last wave of the hand, a last smile to Bertha.

The general dropped her arm to let her pass, and turned to the girl.

"And your father?" he asked in an undertone.

"He is at Nantes."

"Tell him to return to his château and live there at peace. He shall not be disturbed. I would break my sword rather than let my old enemy be arrested!"

"Thanks for him, general."

"That's all right! And do you, if there's anything I can do for you, consider me entirely at your service, mademoiselle."

"I should like a passport for Paris."

"When?"

"Immediately."

"Where shall I send it for you?"

"To the Point du Jour inn, on the other side of the Pont Rousseau."

"Within an hour you shall have your passport, mademoiselle."

With a word of farewell, the general passed under the gloomy arch.

Bertha forced her way through the dense crowd, stopped at the first church she passed, and knelt for a long while on the cold flags, which were all wet with her tears when she rose.

Then she hurried through the town to the Pont Rousseau. As she drew near the Point du Jour, she saw her father sitting in the doorway.

In a few hours the Marquis de Souday had grown ten years older. His eye had lost the bantering expression which gave it so much animation; his head hung low, like a man weighed down by a burden beyond his strength.

Warned by the curé, who had heard Master Jacques' dying confession and had gone to the retreat of the marquis for that purpose, the old man had at once started for Nantes.

Half a league from the Pont Rousseau, he met Bertha,

whose horse had fallen and broken a tendon, as a result of the furious pace she had ridden.

She confessed to her father all that had taken place. The old man uttered not a word of reproach, but broke his stick against the stones in the road.

When they reached the Pont Rousseau, although it was only seven o'clock in the morning, they learned by common report of the arrest of the duchesse, — which had not then been consummated, however.

Bertha, not daring to meet her father's eye, hurried ahead into the town; while the old man sat down upon the bench, where we find him four hours later.

This sorrow was the only one against which his selfish epicurean philosophy was powerless. He would have forgiven his daughter many faults, but he could not think without a despairing shudder that she had sullied his name with the crime of *lèse-chivalry*, and that the Soudays, in their decline, had helped to plunge royalty into the abyss.

When Bertha approached, he silently held out to her a folded paper which a gendarme had just handed him.

"Won't you forgive me, as she has done, father?" pleaded the poor girl, in a tone of gentle humility, in striking contrast with her independent manner of other days.

The old gentleman sadly shook his head.

"Where shall I find my poor Jean Oullier?" said he. "Since God has decreed that I must live on, I long to see him. I want him to go with me far from this country."

"You mean to leave Souday, father?"

"Yes."

"Where shall you go?"

"Where I can hide my name."

"And Mary, poor Mary, who is as innocent as I am guilty?"

"Mary will be the wife of the man who was also responsible in part for this execrable crime. I will never see Mary more."

"You will remain alone?"

"No, indeed. I shall have Jean Oullier."

Bertha hung her head. She went into the inn, where she exchanged her peasant dress for the mourning garments she had purchased. When she came out, the old man was no longer where she had left him. She espied him plodding sadly along the Saint Philbert road, with his hands behind his back and his head bent forward upon his chest.

Bertha sobbed bitterly. She cast a last glance upon the verdant plain of the Retz country, which could be seen in the distance, bordered by the bluish lines of Machecoul forest; and crying, "Adieu, all that I love on earth!" she went back into the town of Nantes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE EXECUTIONER OF GOD.

DURING the three hours which Courtin passed, bound hand and foot, and lying on the ground in the ruins of Saint Philbert, side by side with the dead body of Joseph Picaut, his heart experienced every variety of agony by which the human heart can be torn and tortured.

He felt his precious belt still under him, having taken the precaution to lie upon it; but the very gold added new sufferings to his suffering, new terrors to the terrors by which his brain was assailed.

For was not this gold, which was dearer to him than his life, going to escape him? Who was the stranger of whom he had heard Master Jacques speak to the widow? What was the mysterious vengeance he had to fear? The mayor of La Logerie passed in review all those whom, during his whole life, he had injured; the list was a long one, and their threatening forms thronged about him in the darkness of the tower.

From time to time, however, a ray of hope brightened up his sinister thoughts for a moment; vague and uncertain at first, it gradually assumed definite shape. Was it possible that a man who owned such a lot of beautiful louis could die? Suppose the threatening form of Vengeance should arise before him, had he not gold in plenty to throw to it, and impose silence upon it? Then he counted and recounted in imagination the sum belonging to him, which was really his, which he

gloried to feel hurting him, and making holes in his flesh, as if it were actually becoming part of his body. Then he thought of the other fifty thousand francs he was going to have to put with it if he succeeded in making his escape; and, tightly bound as he was, a victim ready for the sacrifice, only waiting for the sword of Damocles, which was suspended over his head, to fall, as it might do at any moment, and put an end to his life, his heart felt an exultant thrill of happiness, which was almost ecstasy. But soon his thoughts changed their direction again: he began to wonder whether his accomplice—in whom he had only an accomplice's confidence—would not profit by his absence to make away with the share reserved for him; he seemed to see him, fleeing, staggering under the weight of the enormous sum he was carrying, and refusing to share with him, although he was the one who had been guilty of all the treachery. Then he set about formulating prayers which would melt the Jew's heart under those circumstances, threats which would terrify him into disgorging, reproaches which would shame him; and when he reflected that M. Hyacinthe very probably loved gold as dearly as himself, being a Jew; when he measured up his confederate by his own measure; when he realized, by questioning his own greed, the immensity of the sacrifice he proposed to ask his confederate to make,—when, in short, he confessed to himself that tears, prayers, reproaches, and threats would be of no avail, then he fell into paroxysms of rage, and roared so that he shook the old arches of the feudal structure. He twisted about in his bonds; he bit at them, and tried to tear them apart with his teeth; but the cords, slight and fine though they were, seemed to derive animation and life from his efforts. He thought he could feel them

struggling with him, and doubling the number of knots and twists. The knots that he untied seemed to tie themselves up again, twice and thrice as complicated as before; and at the same time, as if to punish him for his vain attempts, they sank into his flesh, and left a burning furrow there. All his hopeful dreams, all his absorbing thoughts of wealth and happiness, vanished then like clouds before the breath of the tempest. The phantoms of those whom the farmer had persecuted rose up before him, terrible of aspect. In the darkness everything assumed human form,—stones, rafters, pieces of fallen flooring, tottering cornices, everything; and all these threatening shapes gazed at him with eyes that shone in the darkness like thousands of sparks against a dark background. The poor wretch's brain whirled; insane with terror and despair, he appealed to the dead body of Joseph Picaut, whose stiffened shape he saw some few feet away. He offered him a quarter, a third, half of his gold, if he would remove his bonds. But only the echo replied with its mournful voice; and exhausted with emotion, he relapsed into momentary insensibility.

He was in one of these brief periods of stupor when a noise outside made him start; some one was walking in the inner courtyard of the château, and soon he heard a hand at work on the bolts of the old fruit-room.

His heart beat fit to burst; he gasped with dread, he was suffocated with agony; for he had a presentiment that the person who was about to enter was the avenger of whom Master Jacques had spoken.

The door opened, and the light of a torch cast a red glare under the arch. Courtin had a moment of hope; for it was the widow, in whose hand was the torch, whom he first caught sight of, and he thought for an instant that she was alone. But when she had advanced

a step or two into the tower, she disclosed to his view a man in her wake.

The farmer's hair stood erect on his head; he could not summon courage enough to look at the man's face, so he closed his eyes, and made no sound.

The man and the widow came on toward him. Marianne gave the torch to her companion, pointing with her finger to Master Courtin; and as if she were utterly indifferent as to what was going to happen, she knelt at the feet of what had been Joseph Picaut, and began to pray.

The man, meanwhile, drew close to Master Courtin; and, probably to convince himself that it was really the mayor of La Logerie, he passed the torch in front of his face.

"Can he be asleep?" the explorer asked himself, in an undertone. "Oh, no! he's too much of a coward to sleep. No, his face is too pale. He's not asleep —"

Thereupon he stuck his torch in a crevice of the wall, sat down upon a huge rock which had rolled down from the arch into the middle of the tower, and thus addressed Courtin: —

"Come, open your eyes, Monsieur le Maire! We have to talk together, and I like to see the eyes of those who talk to me."

"Jean Oullier!" shrieked Courtin changing from pale to livid, and making a desperate attempt to break his bonds and escape; "Jean Oullier alive!"

"Even if it were only his ghost, I imagine, Monsieur Courtin, that it would be quite sufficient to frighten you; for you have a long account to settle with me!"

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Courtin, letting himself fall back upon the ground, utterly disheartened, and as if resigned to his fate.

"Our hatred dates from a long time back, does n't it?" rejoined Oullier, "and its instincts have never deceived us. It has made you wage bitter, relentless war on me; and to-day it brings me, although nigh death, back to you."

"I have never hated you, for my part," said Courtin, who felt hope springing up in his breast again, when Jean Oullier failed to kill him at the very first; and he thought he saw a possibility of saving his own life by discussing the matter,— "I never hated you; quite the opposite! And if my bullet did strike you, it was n't intended for you; I did n't know you were in the bushes."

"Oh, my grievances against you go much farther back than that, Monsieur Courtin."

"Farther back than that?" rejoined Courtin, gradually recovering some of his strength. "Why, I solemnly swear that before that mishap, which I deeply deplore, I never put your life in danger, and never did you an injury."

"Your memory is short, and insults seem to make more impression on the feelings of the insulted; for I remember, though you don't."

"What? Come, what do you remember? Speak, Monsieur Jean Oullier. Is it proper to condemn a man without a hearing, to kill a poor wretch without permitting him to say a word in his own defence?"

"Who told you, pray, that I propose to kill you?" said Oullier, with the freezing calmness which he had not laid aside for a moment. "Your conscience, no doubt!"

"Oh, speak, speak, Monsieur Jean! Tell me what you accuse me of, besides that unfortunate shot, and I am sure I shall come out of it as white as snow. Yes, oh, yes! I will prove to you that no one has ever loved

better than myself the venerated occupants of the Château de Souday, that no one has respected them as deeply as I have, or rejoiced as much over the marriage which is to bring you and my master's family closer together."

"Monsieur Courtin," said Jean, who had let this torrent of words flow on without interruption, "as you say, it is fair that the accused should have a chance to defend himself, so do you defend yourself if you can. Now listen! I am going to begin."

"Oh, go ahead; I'm not afraid," said Courtin.

"We'll see about that. Who betrayed me to the gendarmes at Montaigu fair, in order to make it easier to get at my master's guests, whom you rightly imagined that I would defend? Who, having done that, lay in wait like a coward behind the hedge in the last garden in Montaigu, borrowed a gun from the owner of the garden, and made use of it to fire upon and kill my dog — my humble companion? Who, if not you? Answer, Monsieur Courtin."

"Who dares say that he saw me fire the shot?" cried the farmer.

"Three persons have testified to it, among them the owner of the weapon you used."

"Could I tell that the dog was yours? No, Monsieur Jean, upon my honor, I did n't know it."

Jean Oullier waved his hand contemptuously.

"Who was it," he continued in the same calm but accusing voice, "who sneaked into Pascal Picaut's house, and sold to the Blues the secret of the blessed hospitality of that fireside, — a secret which he learned by accident?"

"I bear witness to that!" said the melancholy voice of Pascal Picaut's widow, emerging from her motionless silence.

The farmer shuddered, and did not dare to attempt an excuse.

"For the last four months," Oullier went on, "whom have I continually found in my path, devising shameful schemes, laying his traps under the shelter of his master's name, parading his devoted and faithful attachment, and sullyng these virtues by placing them in contact with his criminal designs? Whom did I hear on Bouaimé moor, discussing the price of blood, weighing the gold which was offered him for the most dastardly and hateful treason? Who, again, if not you?"

"I swear to you by all that men hold most sacred," said Courtin, apparently unable to get rid of the idea that Oullier's principal grievance against him was the wound he had inflicted, — "I swear to you that I did n't know it was you in that wretched bush."

"But when I tell you that I don't reproach you for that! I have n't said a word to you on the subject, nor will I open my mouth. The list of your crimes is long enough without that."

"You speak of my crimes, Jean Oullier, and you forget that my young master, who is soon to become yours, owes his life to me; that if I had been the traitor you charge me with being, I might have betrayed him to the soldiers, who passed and repassed my house many times every day. You forget all this, while, on the other hand, you arm yourself with all sorts of insignificant matters to load me down."

"If you saved your master," retorted Jean, in the same inexorable tone, "it was because that pretended generosity was useful to your schemes; and it would have been much better for him, and much better for the poor girls, to let them end their lives honorably, gloriously, than to involve them in these shameful intrigues.

And it is with that I reproach you, Courtin; it is that thought which doubles my hatred of you."

"The proof that I wish you no ill, Jean Oullier," rejoined Courtin, "is to be found in this: that if I had chosen, you would long ago have ceased to be of this world."

"What do you mean by that?"

"When M. Michel's father was killed,—was murdered, Monsieur Jean, let us not mince matters,—there was a beater not more than ten paces away from him; and that beater's name was Courtin."

Jean Oullier drew himself up to his full height.

"Yes," pursued the farmer, "and that same beater saw that it was Jean Oullier's bullet which stretched the traitor out on the grass."

"And if the beater tells that story, he will tell the truth; for that was no crime: it was an expiation," said Jean; "and I am proud to have been the one selected by Providence to smite the infamous scoundrel!"

"God alone can smite, God alone can curse, Monsieur Oullier."

"No! Oh, I know I'm right. He it was who planted in my heart that bitter hatred of the crime, the ineradicable memory of the treachery; it was his finger which touched my heart, when my heart shuddered every time I heard the Judas's name mentioned. When I smote him, I felt the breath of the Divine justice passing across my face with refreshing coolness; and thenceforth I found the peace and rest which had shunned me all the time I watched the unpunished criminal prospering under my very eyes. You see that God was with me."

"God cannot be with the murderer."

"God is always with the executioner who has wielded

the sword of his justice. Men have their swords, and he has his; that day I was the sword of God, as I am to-day."

"Are you going to assassinate me, then, as you assassinated Baron Michel?"

"I am going to punish the man who sold Petit-Pierre, as I punished him who sold Charette; I am going to punish him fearlessly, without anxiety or remorse."

"Beware! remorse may come when your future master demands from you a reckoning for his father's death."

"The youth is just and true; and if he is called upon to judge me, I will tell him what I saw in the wood of La Chabotière, and he may decide between us."

"Who can testify that you tell the truth? One single man, and I am he. Let me live, Jean, and when occasion requires I will rise as this woman did but now, and say, 'I bear witness to it.'"

"Fear makes you foolish, Courtin. M. Michel will call for no proof when Jean Oullier shall say to him, 'This is the truth;' when Jean Oullier, baring his breast, shall say to him, 'If you wish to avenge your father, strike!' when he shall kneel before him, and ask God to expiate his deed, if he deems that it calls for expiation. No, no! And the terror which freezes your blood led you astray in evoking that remembrance of the past. You, Master Courtin, have done even worse than Michel did; for the blood which you sold is far nobler than that which he betrayed. I did n't spare Michel, and shall I spare you? No, never! never!"

"Mercy, Jean Oullier! Don't kill me!" sobbed the miserable wretch.

"Implore these stones, ask them to pity you,— perhaps they will reply; but nothing will move my resolution, Courtin. You must die!"

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" cried Courtin, "will no one come to my assistance? Widow Picaut, Widow Picaut, help, help! Will you let me be murdered thus? Protect me, I implore you! If you want gold, I will give it to you. I have gold — But, no, no! I was raving; I have none, I have none!" whined the craven cur, fearing to heighten the homicidal fever which he saw blazing in his enemy's eyes. "No, I have none; but I have land, which I will give you. I will make you both rich. Mercy, Jean Oullier! Widow Picaut, protect me!"

The widow did not stir; except for the movement of her lips, she might well have been mistaken, as she knelt, white as marble, in her black clothes, motionless and mute by the side of the corpse, for one of the statues which we see kneeling at the foot of ancient tombstones.

"What! Are you going to kill me?" Courtin went on; "kill me without a combat, or without any danger to yourself, when I cannot raise a foot to fly, or a hand to defend myself? Murder me in my bonds, like an ox dragged to the shambles! Oh, Jean Oullier, that's a butcher's work, not a soldier's!"

"Who told you it was going to be like that? No, no, no, Master Courtin. Look at the wound you made in my breast; it is still bleeding. I am still weak and unsteady; I am proscribed; a price is set on my head; and yet, notwithstanding all that, I am so sure of the justice of my cause that I don't hesitate to refer it to the tribunal of God Almighty. Courtin, I am going to set you free."

"You set me free?"

"Yes, I set you free. Oh, don't thank me; I do it for myself and not for you. I do it so that it can't be

said that Jean Oullier struck a prostrate, unarmed man. But, mark this! this life which I leave with you, I expect soon to take away."

"*Mon Dieu!*"

"Master Courtin, you are going to leave this place without bonds, or hindrance of any sort; but look to yourself! Mark my warning. As soon as you have left these ruins I shall be upon your trail, and I shall never abandon it until I have had my turn at dealing out blows to you, until I have made a corpse of your body. Look to yourself, Master Courtin, look to yourself!"

As he finished speaking, Jean took his knife and cut the cords with which the farmer's hands and feet were bound.

Courtin's first impulse was one of frenzied joy; but he repressed it at once. As he rose from the ground he felt his belt, which in a certain sense recalled him to himself. With hope, Jean Oullier restored his life; but what was life without his gold?

He lay down again as quickly as he had risen.

Jean Oullier, swift as Courtin's movement was, caught sight of the bulging leather belt, and guessed what was going on in the farmer's mind.

"What keeps you from going, pray?" said he. "Oh, yes, I see; you are afraid that when I see you free as I am, and stronger than I am, my anger will blaze up again. You are afraid that I will throw you a second knife, and armed with this one myself, say to you, 'Defend yourself, Master Courtin!' No, Jean Oullier has but one word. Make haste; fly! If God is with you, he will protect you from my blows; if he has judged and condemned you, what matters it how much lead I give you? Take your cursed gold, and begone!"

Master Courtin made no reply, but stood up, staggering like a drunken man. He tried to fasten the belt around his waist, but could not do it, for his hands shook as if he had a fever.

Before going away he turned in a terrified way toward Jean Oullier. The traitor feared treachery. He could not believe that his foe's magnanimity did not conceal some trap.

Jean pointed to the door. Courtin rushed out into the courtyard; but before he had passed through the postern he heard the old Vendean's voice, sonorous as a bugle-blast, —

"Look to yourself, Courtin! look to yourself!"

Courtin, free though he was, shuddered; and at that moment, his foot striking a stone, he tripped, and fell headlong.

He uttered a shriek, for it seemed to him as if the Vendean was upon him. He thought he could feel the cold blade of the knife in his back.

It was only a bad omen, however. Courtin rose, and a minute later had passed out the gate and was hurrying into the fields which he had thought he was never to see again.

When he had disappeared, the widow went up to Jean Oullier, and gave him her hand.

"Jean," said she, "as I listened to you, I thought how much truth there was in what Pascal used to say, — that there were noble men under all flags."

Jean warmly pressed the hand held out to him by the excellent woman who had saved his life.

"How do you feel now?" she asked him.

"Better. One always finds strength in a struggle."

"Where do you mean to go?"

"To Nantes. According to what your mother told

me, Bertha didn't go there; and I am terribly afraid some mishap may have taken place there."

"Very well; but take a boat, at least. It will spare your legs for half of the distance."

"All right," Jean replied, and he followed the widow to the spot where the fishing-boats were hauled up on the sand.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHEREIN IT APPEARS THAT A MAN WHO HAS FIFTY THOUSAND FRANCS UPON HIM MAY SOMETIMES BE SADLY EMBARRASSED BY THEM.

As soon as Master Courtin had crossed the bridge of the Château of Saint Philbert, he began to run like a madman. Fear lent him wings. He flew along without thought as to where his steps were leading him; he fled simply for the sake of fleeing. If his strength had not proved inadequate, he would have put the whole world between himself and the threats of the Vendean,—threats which rang in his ears like his death-knell.

But when he had run half a league across lots in the direction of Machecoul, he was so exhausted and breathless with the rapidity of his pace that he sank down on the edge of a ditch, where he gradually came to himself, and reflected as to his future course.

His first thought was to go home at once; but he soon abandoned that. In the country, no matter how great pains might be taken by the authorities to insure his safety, Jean Oullier, with his wide acquaintance throughout the province and his perfect familiarity with all the roads, with every clump of woods and every tuft of heather, seconded by the universal sympathy with him and the universal detestation of Courtin, would have too good a chance.

Nantes, then, was the place where he must seek shelter; in Nantes, where his life would be in the

safe-keeping of a numerous and skilful police force until Jean Oullier's arrest should be consummated,— a result which Courtin flattered himself he could very soon bring about by means of the information he was able to give as to the ordinary hiding-places of the rebels and the fugitives from justice.

In the midst of his reflections he put his hand to his belt to lift it up; for the tremendous weight of the mass of gold it contained took his breath away, and had contributed in no small degree to the exhaustion which had forced him to rest.

That movement decided him.

Should he not find M. Hyacinthe at Nantes? The thought that he was to receive from his confederate, if their plot had succeeded,— and he had no doubt of it,— a sum equal to that which he already possessed, filled Courtin's heart with a gladness which lifted him above all the tribulations he had lately passed through.

His hesitation was at an end; and he retraced his steps toward the town.

At first Master Courtin thought of going straight to Nantes across the fields, as the crow flies. On the high-road he was in danger of being spied upon, whereas nought but chance could put Jean Oullier on his tracks in the open country. But his imagination, heated by the events of the evening, was more powerful than his reason.

In vain did he sneak along behind the hedges, remaining in the shadow, walking noiselessly, entering no field until he was sure that it was deserted; every instant he was seized with a new panic.

In the trees with pruned tops, which rose behind the hedges, he fancied that he saw assassins waiting for him to pass. The tangled branches which met over his

head were hands armed with daggers, ready to strike. Then he would stop, frozen stiff with fright. His legs would refuse to carry him farther, as if they had taken root in the earth; his body would be bathed in cold perspiration, his teeth chatter convulsively, his clinched hands clutch at his gold, and it would take him a long while to recover from his terror.

At last he reached the road.

There he thought his suffering would be less acute. He would meet people passing there who might, to be sure, be enemies, but who would help him if he were attacked; and in his then state of unreasoning panic, he thought that any living being, whoever it might be, would seem less dreadful to him than these menacing, black spectres, implacable in their motionless silence, whom his terror conjured up at every step in the fields.

Then, too, he might meet on the road some conveyance bound for Nantes, procure a seat in it, and thus shorten the journey by half.

He had walked some five hundred paces along the road, when he found himself on the embankment which skirts the shores of the lake of Grand-Lieu for a quarter of a league, and answers all the purposes of a dike and at the same time forms a passable road.

Courtin stopped from moment to moment to listen, and soon he thought he could hear the step of a horse on the roadway.

He plunged into the reeds which lie along the road on the lake side, and crouched down, undergoing anew all the different forms of agony we have just described.

But then he heard, at his left, the sound of oars dipping softly in the water.

He crept between the rushes, and looked in the direction from which the sound seemed to come; and

there he saw in the darkness a boat gliding gently along the shore.

It was some fisherman, doubtless, on his way to haul, before dawn, the nets he had cast the day before.

The horse was drawing nearer. The ringing of his shoes on the stones frightened Courtin, who scented danger in that direction, and thought only of flying from that.

He whistled softly, to attract the attention of the fisherman, who stopped rowing, and listened.

"This way! this way!" cried Courtin.

He had not finished speaking when a vigorous stroke of the oars brought the boat to within four paces of him.

"Can you take me across the lake and land me at Port Saint Martin?" the farmer inquired. "There's a franc for you."

The fisherman, wrapped in a sort of cloak, the hood of which hid his face, made no other reply than an affirmative inclination of the head; but he did better than reply. With his boat-hook he pushed his skiff into the midst of the reeds, which bent, rustling, under her bow. And just as the horse, which had aroused Courtin's anxiety, reached the spot where he was, he made two long strides, and leaped into the boat.

The fisherman, as if he shared the farmer's apprehension, pulled vigorously away from the shore; and Courtin breathed freely once more. In ten minutes the embankment and the trees which lined it had dwindled away to a dark line on the horizon.

Courtin could not contain his joy. Finding the boat at the right spot in the very nick of time went beyond his wildest hopes. Once at Port Saint Martin, he was only a league from Nantes,—a league over a

road thronged with people at all hours of the night. And let him once reach Nantes, and he was saved.

So great was his delight that, under its influence, and as a result of the reaction from the anguish of terror he had suffered, he allowed his high spirits to manifest themselves, in spite of himself. Sitting in the stern of the skiff, he gazed deliriously at the fisherman, who was bending sturdily to his oars, and taking him, with every effort of his strength, farther away from the shore where danger lay. He counted the strokes. Then he laughed a hollow laugh, patted his belt, and looked at the gold shining through its folds. It was not happiness; it was intoxication.

At last he began to think that the fisherman had pulled far enough away from the shore, and that it was time to head for Port Saint Martin, which they would inevitably leave far to the right if they continued to follow the course they were then taking.

For some moments he waited, supposing that it was a manoeuvre of the fisherman, in search of some current which would make his task easier.

But he rowed on and on into the centre of the lake.

"Well, *gars*," said the farmer, at last, "you must have misunderstood me. I did n't say that I wanted to go to Port Saint Père; it was Port Saint Martin. So head that way, and you will earn your money all the sooner."

The fisherman said not a word.

"Did you hear me there?" rejoined Courtin, testily. "Port Saint Martin, goodman! You must pull to the right. It was all right not to pull along too near the embankment; I am very glad to be out of reach of any bullets which might be fired at us from the shore. But let's go that way now, please!"

The oarsman gave no sign that he heard Courtin's remarks.

"Ah, çà! are you deaf?" cried the farmer, beginning to lose his temper.

The fisherman replied only with a fresh stroke, which sent the little boat ten paces farther along the surface of the lake.

Courtin, beside himself, rushed forward, pulled off the hood which kept the boatman's face in shadow, put his head close to the other's, and fell on his knees amidships with a stifled cry.

The boatman laid down his oars, and said, without rising, —

"Decidedly, Master Courtin, God has pronounced and is still pronouncing against you. I was not looking for you, and he sends you to me. I had forgotten you for a time, and he places you in my path! God wills that you should die, Master Courtin."

"No, no, you won't kill me, Jean Oullier!" cried the farmer, all his earlier terrors crowding back upon him.

"I will kill you as truly as those stars are shining in heaven, placed there by the Lord with his own hands! So, then, if you have a soul, look to it! Repent, and pray that his judgment may not be too severe!"

"Oh, you won't do that, Jean Oullier! You won't do that! Just think that you are going to kill one of the creatures of that same merciful God whose name you utter! Oh, never again to see the earth which is so beautiful when the sun shines upon it! To sleep in a cold coffin, far from all those whom one loves! Oh, no; it cannot be!"

"If you were a father, if you had a wife, a mother, a sister awaiting your return home, your prayers might

move me. But no. Useless to mankind, you have lived only to make use of your fellows, and to return them evil for good. Your lying tongue blasphemes still; for you never loved anybody, nor did anybody ever love you. And when my dagger enters your breast, it will pierce no other heart than yours. Master Courtin, you are going to appear before your Maker. Once more, I say, commend your soul to him."

"What! Will a few poor minutes be enough for that? A guilty wretch, as I am, needs years to make his repentance commensurate with his sins. You, Jean Oullier, who are so religious, will surely leave me my life, to be used in bewailing my errors."

"No, no; you would use it in committing fresh ones! Your death will be an expiation! You fear to die. Lay your anguish at the Lord's feet, and he will take you to his pitying bosom! Master Courtin, time flies; and as truly as God is sitting on his throne above the stars, in ten minutes you will be before him."

"Ten minutes, *mon Dieu!* ten minutes. Oh, mercy! mercy!"

"The time you employ in vain appeals is wasted for your soul. Think of that, Courtin, think of that!"

Courtin did not reply. His hand was resting on an oar, and a ray of hope shot through his brain.

He noiselessly laid hold of the oar. Then, rising suddenly, he waved it over the Vendean's head. The old man threw himself to the right, and dodged the blow. The oar fell upon the planking of the bow and broke into a thousand pieces, leaving only a fragment in the farmer's hands.

Quick as lightning, Jean Oullier leaped at his throat, and Courtin again fell on his knees.

Paralyzed by fear, the wretch rolled in the bottom

of the boat. In a strangled voice, he hoarsely whispered, "Mercy, mercy!"

"Aha! The fear of death awoke a bit of courage in you!" cried Oullier. "Aha! So you found a weapon! All the better! all the better! Defend yourself, Courtin; and if you're not content with the weapon you have in your hand, take mine," he continued, throwing his dagger at the farmer's feet.

But he was incapable of movement. Everything of the sort had become impossible to him. He faltered some incoherent, meaningless words; his whole body trembled, as if he were in convulsions. There was a confused ringing in his ears; and as he had lost his voice, all his senses were paralyzed by the dread of death.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Oullier, kicking the inert mass which lay before him,—" *mon Dieu!* I can't use the knife upon this corpse."

Thereupon the old man looked around, as if seeking something.

Nature was in her calmest mood. The night was absolutely still; there was scarcely a breath to ruffle the smooth surface of the lake. The lapping of the water against the sides of the boat could hardly be detected. Nought was to be heard save the cry of the water-fowl which flew along in front of the boat, and whose wings made black spots upon the purplish strips which had begun to appear in the east, heralding the dawn.

Jean Oullier turned abruptly upon Courtin, and shook him by the arm.

"Master Courtin, I won't kill you without sharing your danger," said he. "Master Courtin, I will compel you to defend yourself against death, at all events, if not against me. It is coming, it is drawing very near; so defend yourself!"

The farmer replied only with a groan. He rolled his haggard eyes around; but it was easy to see that his glance distinguished none of the objects which surrounded him. Death — terrible, hideous, threatening — blinded his eyes to all else.

At the same moment, Jean Oullier drove his heel violently into the planking. The half-rotten boards gave way, and the water rushed into the boat.

Courtin came to himself as he felt the cold water about his feet, and gave vent to a fearful shriek, — a shriek which had nothing human about it.

“I am lost!” he cried.

“It’s the judgment of God!” cried Oullier, raising his arms toward the sky. “Once I did n’t strike you because you were bound; again my hand spares you, Master Courtin. If your good angel wishes well to you, let him save you! At all events, I have n’t dipped my hands in your blood.”

Courtin had risen while Jean Oullier was speaking, and was running to and fro, splashing the water about.

Oullier, calm and impassive, was kneeling at the bow. He was praying.

The water poured in in increasing volume.

“Oh, who will save me? Who will save me?” cried Courtin, with livid countenance, gazing in terror at the scant six inches of wood which remained above the surface of the lake.

“God, if he chooses! Your life, like mine, is in his hands; let him take one or the other, or save or condemn us both. We are before his tribunal. Once more I say, Master Courtin, accept his decree.”

As Jean finished speaking, the boat creaked ominously in every part of her frame. The water had risen to the last plank. She turned around once, as on a pivot,

remained a second longer on the surface, then sank beneath the feet of the two men and was lost to sight in the bosom of the lake, with a long-drawn, mournful murmur.

Courtin was drawn down in the eddy; but he came up again to the surface, and grasped the second oar, which was floating near him. The light, dry wood held him up long enough to allow him to appeal once more to Jean Oullier. He made no reply. He was swimming noiselessly away, in the direction of the dawn.

"Help! help!" cried the wretched Courtin. "Help me to get ashore, Jean Oullier, and I'll give you all the gold I have upon me."

"Throw the filthy gold to the bottom of the lake," said the Vendean, as he saw the farmer clinging to his oar. "It's your last chance of saving your life, and this advice is all I choose to give you."

Courtin put his hand to his belt; but if it had burned his fingers, he couldn't have snatched it away more quickly. It was as if the Vendean had called upon him to open his entrails, to sacrifice his flesh and his blood.

"No, no," he muttered, "I will save the gold, and myself with it."

Thereupon he tried to swim.

But he was neither as strong nor as skilful in that exercise as Jean Oullier. Moreover, the weight he was carrying was too heavy; and at every stroke he went under the water, which got into his throat, despite all he could do to prevent it.

He appealed again to Jean Oullier. But he was a hundred strokes away.

In one of his immersions, which lasted longer than

the others, he had an attack of vertigo; and with a quick, unthinking movement, he unfastened his belt. But before he let his gold go, he wanted to see it, to feel it once more; so he pressed it to his side again, and fondled it with his clinched hands.

This last contact with the metal, which was more to him than his life, decided his fate. He could not make up his mind to part with it. He pressed it to his breast, and made a mighty effort with his feet to throw himself out of the water; but the weight of the upper part of his body pulled down his extremities. He went under again; and after a few seconds, reappeared once more, half-suffocated, hurled a last imprecation at the starry vault, which he saw for the last time, and sank to the bottom of the lake, drawn down by his gold, as by a demon.

Jean Oullier, looking back at that moment, saw the circles spreading out on the surface of the water. It was the last sign of the mayor of La Logerie's existence; it was the last movement around and above him in the world of the living.

Jean raised his eyes toward heaven, and worshipped God for the justness of his decrees.

He was a fine swimmer; but his recent wound and the fatigue and emotion of that terrible night had completely exhausted him. When he was within a hundred yards of the shore, he felt as if his strength would betray his courage; but as calm and resolute at that supreme moment as he had always been throughout his life, he determined to struggle on to the end.

He swam on.

Soon he felt a sort of faintness. His limbs lost their activity; it seemed as if the points of a thousand pins were sticking into him at once. His muscles ached;

and at the same time the blood rushed madly to his brain, and a confused rumbling, like that of the sea beating against the cliffs, sounded in his ears. Black clouds sprinkled with phosphorescent sparks hovered before his eyes. He felt as if he were dying; and yet his limbs, obedient even in their weakness, still struggled to make the motions which his will enjoined upon them.

Still he swam on.

His eyes closed, do what he would; his limbs grew stiff and unmanageable. He gave a last thought to those with whom he had passed through life, — to the children, the wife, and the old father, who had made his younger days happy; to the two maidens who had taken the places of those who were dear to him. He chose that his last prayer, as well as his last thought, should be for them.

But suddenly, and in spite of himself, a new thought came into his mind, — a phantom passed before his eyes. He saw Michel, the father, covered with blood, lying on the forest moss. At that sight he raised his arms high above the water, toward the sky, and cried:

“My God, if I was wrong, if it was a crime, forgive me for it, — not in this world, but in the other.”

Then, as if this last appeal had exhausted his remaining strength, the soul seemed to abandon the body, floating lifeless on the water, just as the sun, peering from behind the mountains on the horizon, gilded the surface of the lake with his earliest beams; just as Courtin was breathing his last in the mud at the bottom; just as Petit-Pierre was undergoing arrest.

Meanwhile, Michel was on his way to Nantes, under guard of the soldiers, who had made him their prisoner.

They had been on the way about half an hour when the lieutenant who was in command of the little squad came up to him.

"Monsieur," said he, "you have the appearance of a gentleman. I have the honor to be one myself, and it pains me to see your hands in irons. Do you care to give me your parole?"

"Gladly," replied Michel. "I thank you, monsieur, and I swear that I will not leave your side without your permission, from whatever quarter relief may come."

They continued their journey, arm in arm, in such fashion that any one meeting them would have found it difficult to say which of the two was the prisoner.

It was a beautiful night, and the sunrise was superb. All the flowers, wet with dew, sparkled as if diamonds were sprinkled over them. The air was laden with sweet odors; the little birds were singing in the branches, — in short, the early morning walk might well have been taken for the mere pleasure of it.

When they reached the end of the lake of Grand-Lieu, the lieutenant stopped his prisoner, with whom he had gained a good quarter of a league on the rest of the column, and pointed to a black object floating on the water, some fifty paces from the shore.

"What can that be?" said he.

"It looks like the body of a man," Michel replied.

"Can you swim?"

"A little."

"Ah, if I knew how to swim, I would be in the water before this," sighed the officer, looking anxiously back along the road for his men.

Michel waited for nothing more. He ran down the bank, threw off his clothes in a twinkling, and jumped headlong into the lake.

In a very few moments he brought ashore a body in which life seemed to be extinct, and which he recognized as Jean Oullier.

Meanwhile the soldiers had come up and crowded around the drowned man. One of them unslung his flask and forced a few drops of *eau-de-vie* between the Vendean's tightly closed teeth.

He opened his eyes, and his first glance fell upon Michel, who was holding his head. There was such an agonized expression on his face that the lieutenant was misled.

"That's your rescuer, my friend," he said, indicating Michel.

"My rescuer! — his son!" cried Jean Oullier. "Oh, thanks, merciful God, for this! Thou art as grand in the manifestations of thy pity as thou art terrible in thy righteous judgments!"

EPILOGUE.

ON a certain day in the year 1843, about seven o'clock in the evening, a heavy carriage stopped at the door of the Carmelite convent at Chartres.

It contained five persons, — two children of eight or nine years, a man and woman from thirty to thirty-five, and a peasant bent by the weight of years, but hale and hearty still, despite his white locks. Notwithstanding his humble costume, this peasant sat by the lady's side, on the back seat of the carriage; one of the children was on his knees, playing with the links of a great steel chain, by which his watch was attached to the button-hole of his waistcoat, while his horny, wrinkled hand strayed through the little one's silky tresses.

When she felt the change in the jolting of the carriage as it passed from the high-road into the streets of Faubourg Saint Jean, the lady put her head out of the window, but drew it back sorrowfully when she saw the high walls surrounding the convent, and the gloomy door which gave admission thereto.

The postilion descended, came to the door, and said:
"This is the place."

The lady pressed her husband's hand, as he sat opposite her, and two great tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Go, Mary, and God give you strength," said the young man, in whom our readers will recognize Baron Michel de la Logerie. "I am sorry that the rules of the convent forbid my sharing this sad duty with you; it's

the first time in ten years that we have had to undergo any suffering apart from each other."

"You will speak to her of me, won't you?" said the old peasant.

"Yes, dear Jean," replied Mary.

She alighted from the carriage, and knocked at the door; the hammer fell with a doleful sound, which awoke the echoes of the arched portal.

"Mother Sainte Marthe?" Mary inquired of the person who answered the knock.

"Are you the person whom our mother expects?" said the Carmelite.

"Yes, my sister."

"Come in, then. You are to be allowed to see her; but remember that though she be our mother-superior, the rule provides that you can talk with her only in the presence of one of the sisters; and it especially forbids your speaking to her, even at this time, of worldly affairs which she has left behind her."

Mary bent her head.

The attendant led the Baronne de la Logerie through a dark, damp hall, upon which a score of doors opened; she pushed one of them open, and stood aside for Mary to pass in.

The poor girl hesitated a moment; her emotion was suffocating her; then she collected her strength, crossed the threshold, and found herself in a little cell, some eight feet square.

In this cell there was no furniture save a bed, a chair, and a *prie-Dieu*; no ornaments save a few images of saints, nailed to the bare wall, and an ebony and copper crucifix which extended its arms above the *prie-Dieu*.

Mary saw nothing of all this.

Her gaze was concentrated on a woman who lay upon

the bed, — a woman whose face was of the hue of wax, and as transparent, and whose colorless lips seemed ready to exhale their last breath.

This woman was, or had been — Bertha.

Now, she was mother Sainte Marthe, superior of the Carmelite convent of Chartres.

Soon she would be nought but lifeless clay.

As she saw the stranger enter, the dying girl opened her arms, and Mary rushed into them.

For a long time they held one another in a close embrace, Mary bathing her sister's face with her tears, and Bertha gasping; for there seemed to be no more tears for her eyes, sunken by the austere discipline of the cloister, to shed.

The attendant, who was sitting on the chair, reading her breviary, was not so absorbed in her prayers that she did not notice what was going on about her.

She considered, no doubt, that the embrace was prolonged somewhat beyond what the ordinances permitted, for she coughed to warn the sisters.

Mother Sainte Marthe pushed Mary away very gently, but without letting go the hand she held in hers.

"Sister! sister!" Mary whispered, "who would have said that we should ever meet again thus?"

"It is God's will, and we must submit to it," the Carmelite made answer.

"His will seems sometimes very harsh," sighed Mary.

"What do you say, my sister? His will is gentle and pitying in my case; for he might have left me to suffer many years on earth, but he deigns to summon me to him."

"You will meet our father in the realms on high," said Mary.

"And whom shall I leave on earth?"

"Our good friend, Jean Oullier, who is still living, and still loves you, Bertha."

"Thanks! and who else?"

"My husband, and two children, whose names are Pierre and Bertha, and whom I have taught to ask a blessing for you."

A slight flush rose in the cheeks of the dying girl.

"Dear children!" she whispered; "if God grants me a place at his side, I promise you to pray for them up there."

And she began the prayer she was to finish in heaven.

While her lips were moving in prayer, amid the perfect silence of the others, the striking of a clock was heard, and soon after, the tinkling of a bell; last of all, steps approached the door of the cell.

The *viaticum* was being brought to the sufferer.

Mary fell on her knees at the head of Bertha's bed, as the priest entered holding the pyx in his left hand, and the consecrated host in his right.

At this moment Mary felt Bertha's hand seeking hers, as she supposed only for the purpose of pressing it.

But she was wrong, for Bertha slipped into her hand an object which she saw to be a medallion.

She started to examine it.

"No, no," said Bertha; "when I am dead."

Mary made a sign that she would heed the injunction, and bent her head upon her clasped hands.

The cell was filled with kneeling nuns, and as far as the eye could see along the corridor, there were others also kneeling, and praying in their sombre garb.

The dying girl seemed to be gathering strength to appear before her Creator; she lifted herself in bed, murmuring,—

"I am here, O my God!"

The priest placed the host to her lips, and she fell back on the bed, with eyes closed and hands clasped.

Except for the movement of her lips, one would have thought she had ceased to live, so pallid was her face, and so weak the breath that came from her chest.

The priest went through with the other portions of the ceremonial of extreme unction, during which the moribund did not open her eyes again.

Then he went out, and the nuns followed him.

The attendant approached Mary, who was still on her knees, and touched her lightly on the shoulder.

"My sister," said she, "the rules of our order forbid your remaining longer in this cell."

"Bertha! Bertha!" sobbed Mary, "do you hear what she says? *Mon Dieu!* after we had lived twenty years without being separated a single day, to have been apart eleven years, and not be allowed to remain together two hours at the moment that we must part forever!"

"You may remain in the house until I am dead, my sister dear, and I shall be happy to die, knowing that you are near me and praying for me."

Mary tried to bend over to kiss her dying sister once more, but the attendant stopped her, saying,—

"My sister, do not, by recalling earthly souvenirs, turn our sainted mother aside from the heavenly path which she is treading at this moment."

"Oh, but I won't leave her in this way!" cried Mary, throwing herself upon the bed, and pressing her lips to Bertha's, which answered her kiss with a slight trembling; then she herself gently pushed her sister away with her hand.

But the hand with which she did it, had not the strength to renew its clasp of the other; it fell heavily upon the bed.

The nun came forward, and without a tear or a sigh, or the least trace of emotion upon her features, she put the dying girl's hands together and laid them upon her breast.

Then she gently thrust Mary toward the door.

"Oh, Bertha! Bertha!" cried the poor girl, sobbing as if her heart would break.

It seemed to her as if a murmur replied to her sobs, and in that murmur she distinguished the name "Mary."

She was in the hall, and the cell-door closed behind her.

"Oh, let me see her again!" she pleaded,— "just once, only once more!"

But the nun barred the way with arms extended.

"Very well," said Mary, blinded by her tears; "take me where you will, my sister."

The nun led her to an empty cell; its last occupant had died the night before.

Through her tears, Mary spied a *prie-Dieu* surmounted by a crucifix; she fell on her knees before it, and for an hour remained there, absorbed in fervent prayer.

In an hour the nun returned, and said in the same cold and impassive voice,—

"Mother Sainte Marthe is dead."

"May I see her again?" Mary asked.

"The rules of our order forbid it," was the reply.

Mary let her head fall upon her hands with a sigh. In one of her hands she held the object which Bertha handed to her just as she was about to receive the sacrament for the last time.

Mother Sainte Marthe was dead; therefore she was at liberty to see what it was.

As she had guessed from its shape, it was a medallion.

She opened it, and found a lock of hair and a paper.

The hair was of the same color as Michel's; the paper bore these words:—

“Cut while he was asleep, on the night of the 5th June, 1832.”

“O my God!” murmured Mary, raising her eyes to the crucifix,—“O my God, in thy mercy, take her to thy bosom; for thy passion lasted but forty days, while hers has lasted eleven years!”

Placing the medallion over her heart, Mary descended the cold, damp staircase of the convent.

The carriage and its occupants were still waiting at the door.

“Well?” Michel asked, as he opened the door, and stepped forward to meet his wife.

“Alas! all is over,” she said, throwing herself into his arms; “she died promising to pray for us in heaven.”

“Happy children!” said Jean Oullier, laying a hand upon the head of each little one; “happy children! Tread fearlessly your paths in life, for a martyr is watching over you above the stars!”

THE END.

THE CORSICAN BROTHERS.

LIST OF CHARACTERS.

Period, 1841.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS, narrator of the story.

LUCIEN DE FRANCHI, }
LOUIS DE FRANCHI, } twin brothers.

MADAME SAVILIA DE FRANCHI, their mother.

GAETANO ORSO ORLANDI, a Corsican bandit.

MARCO VINCENZIO COLONA, his enemy.

GUISEPPE ANTONIO SARROLA, notary of Sullacaro.

POLO ARBORI, mayor of the Commune of Sullacaro.

MONSIEUR DE CHÂTEAU-RENAUD, }
VICOMTE RENÉ DE CHÂTEAUGRAND, } Parisians.
M. ADRIEN DE BOISSY, }
MONSIEUR D—— }

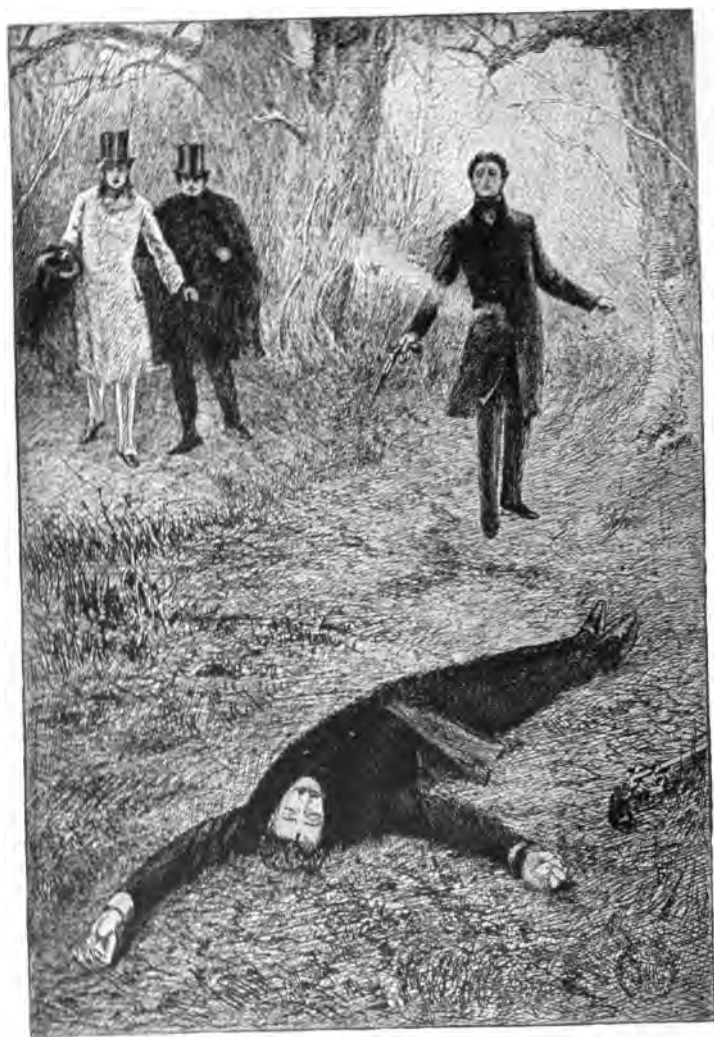
BARON GIORDANO MARTELLI, } friends of Louis de Franchi.
ÉMÉLIE, }

JOSEPH, valet to Louis de Franchi.

GRIFFO, Lucien de Franchi's servant.

MARIA, a servant at the house of Madame de Franchi.







"M. DE CHATEAU-RENAUD WAS STRETCHED
ON THE GROUND, STARK DEAD."

Drawn by Edmund H. Garrett.

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL, II. 455. (THE
CORSICAN BROTHERS.)

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of reaction. The second part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the order of reaction. The third part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the activation energy of a reaction. The fourth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the equilibrium constant of a reaction. The fifth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the rate of reaction. The sixth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the order of reaction. The seventh part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the activation energy of a reaction. The eighth part is devoted to a discussion of the various methods of determining the equilibrium constant of a reaction.

THE CORSICAN BROTHERS.

CHAPTER I.

IN the early part of March, 1841, I was travelling in Corsica.

Nothing could be more picturesque, or more agreeable, than a trip to that island. You embark at Toulon; in twenty hours you are at Ajaccio, or in twenty-four, at Bastia, as you choose.

There you should hire, or purchase, a horse; if the former, you pay but five francs a day, while one can be bought for a hundred and fifty francs in cash. You need not smile in derision either, at the paltry price; for the beast you hire or buy, as the case may be, will, like the Gascon's famous charger, which leaped from the Pont Neuf into the Seine, do things which neither Prospero nor Nautilus, those heroes of the Chantilly and Champ du Mars races, could ever accomplish.

He will pick his way over roads where Balmat himself would have needed grappling-irons, and over bridges which Auriol would not have crossed without a balancing pole.

The traveller has simply to close his eyes, and give the beast his head; the danger of the journey is no concern of his.

We may say further, with respect to this horse, which finds no place impassable, that he will do his fifteen leagues every day without once asking for food or water. From time to time, as you stop to visit an old château built by some great lord, or military hero, or feudal chieftain, or to sketch some old tower erected by the Genoese, he will nibble a tuft of grass, chew the bark of a tree, or lick a moss-covered rock, and all is said.

When we come to the matter of quarters for the night, the solution is even more simple: the traveller reaches a village, rides through the principal street from end to end, selects the house which strikes his fancy, and knocks at the door. In a moment the master or mistress appears upon the threshold, invites the stranger to alight, offers him half of his supper, his whole bed, if he has but one, and the next morning, when he shows him to the door, thanks him for having given his house the preference.

As to paying for the accommodation, it is to be understood that such a thing is quite out of the question; the host would look upon the slightest hint of such a thing as an insult. If the house-servant is a young woman, you may offer her a silk handkerchief, with which she will make herself a picturesque head-dress when she goes to the *fête* at Calvi or Corte. If, on the other hand, the servant is of the male persuasion, he will gladly accept a dagger with which he can make away with his enemy, if he falls in with him.

One thing you must be sure of, however, and that is that the servants, as often happens, are not relations of the master, less prosperous than he, who perform domestic service in exchange for board and lodging, and a piastre or two per month.

Mark well that the masters who are thus waited upon

by their grandnephews, or their cousins fifteen or twenty times removed, are no less well served on that account. Nothing of the sort. Corsica is a French department, but it is far, very far, from being France.

As for robbers, one never hears of such a thing; bandits there are in abundance, to be sure, but the two must by no means be confused.

Go fearlessly to Ajaccio or Bastia, with a purse full of gold hung at your saddle-bow; you may travel to every corner of the island without incurring even the shadow of a danger; but do not go from Occana to Levaco if you have an enemy who has declared the vendetta against you, for in that case I will not answer for your safety even during that short journey of two leagues.

As I was saying, I was in Corsica early in March. I was alone, as Jadin had remained at Rome.

I had come from the island of Elba, landed at Bastia, and invested in a horse at the price above mentioned.

I had visited Corte and Ajaccio, and was passing through the province of Sartène. On the day in question I was on my way from Sartène to Sullacaro.

It was not a long trip, — about a dozen leagues perhaps, including the windings of the road, and the passage over a spur of the mountain chain which forms the backbone of the island. I had taken a guide for fear of going astray among the mountains.

About five o'clock we reached the summit of a hill which overlooks both Olmeto and Sullacaro. We halted there for a moment.

"Where does your lordship wish to put up for the night?" my guide inquired.

I looked down upon the village, being able from our lofty position to see each street from end to end. They

seemed almost deserted; only a few women were abroad, and they were walking along very fast, and looking around on all sides.

As I was at liberty to choose freely among the hundred or hundred and twenty houses which made up the village, by virtue of the rules of hospitality which obtained in the island, as I have already said, I looked about for the dwelling which seemed to offer the greatest possibilities in the way of comfort, and decided upon a certain square house, built like a fortress, with protecting spikes in front of the windows and over the door.

It was the first time I had seen any of these private fortifications; but then I ought to say that the province of Sartène is classic ground, so far as the vendetta is concerned.

"Ah, very well," said the guide following the motion of my hand, "we will go to Madame Savilia de Franchi's. Upon my word, your lordship has not made a bad choice, and it's easy to see that you've had experience."

I must not forget to say that in this eighty-sixth department of France, Italian is universally spoken.

"But," I asked, "would n't it be rather out of the way for me to ask hospitality from a woman?—for I understood you to say that that house belongs to a woman."

"To be sure," he replied wonderingly. "But what does your lordship see out of the way in that?"

"If it's a young woman," said I, inspired by a sentiment of propriety, or, let me confess, of Parisian self-esteem, "she might be compromised by my passing a night under her roof."

"Compromised?" he repeated, evidently in doubt as to the meaning of the word, which I had Italianized with the customary assurance of a thorough-bred Frenchman undertaking to struggle with a foreign language.

"Why, yes, of course," I retorted, beginning to lose my patience; "the woman is a widow, is n't she?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"Well, then, will she receive a young man in her house?"

In 1841, I was thirty-six and a half, but I still called myself a young man.

"Will she receive a young man?" The guide repeated my words. "Why, what is it to her, whether you're young or old?"

I saw that I should make no progress if I continued that form of interrogation.

"How old is Madame Savilia?" I inquired.

"Forty years, or thereabouts."

"Ah," I exclaimed, replying to my own thoughts, "that's first rate! And she has children, no doubt?"

"Two sons,—fine young fellows."

"Shall I see them?"

"You will see the one who lives with her."

"And the other?"

"The other lives at Paris."

"How old are they?"

"Twenty-one."

"Both of them?"

"Yes, they are twins."

"What profession are they fitting for?"

"The one at Paris is to be a lawyer."

"And the other?"

"He will be a Corsican."

"Ah, indeed!" said I. The reply seemed quite characteristic to me, made as it was in the most natural tone imaginable. "All right; we'll make for Madame Savilia de Franchi's house."

We resumed our journey, and ten minutes later we entered the village.

Then I noticed one thing which I was unable to see from the top of the hill. Every house was fortified like Madame Savilia's; not, to be sure, with spikes,—the poverty of their owners doubtless precluded their indulgence in that luxury of fortification,—but with simple, rough joists, which were arranged inside the windows, with openings for guns. Other windows were blocked up with red brick.

I asked my guide for the name of these loopholes; his reply was that they were *archères*,—a reply which convinced me that Corsican vendettas dated back before the invention of fire-arms.

The farther we advanced along the street, the more deserted and melancholy the aspect of the village became.

Several of the houses seemed to have passed through a siege, and were riddled with bullets. Now and then we could see an eye gazing inquisitively at us through a loophole, as we passed; but it was impossible to determine whether it belonged to man or woman.

We reached at last the house I had pointed out to my guide, which was really quite the most pretentious in the whole settlement.

One thing struck me, however. It was that, although seemingly protected by the spikes I have mentioned, it was not so protected in fact; that is to say, the windows had no joists or brick, and no *archères*, but consisted of simple panes of glass, closed at night by wooden shutters.

It is true that those same shutters bore certain marks which the eye of an observer could not mistake for anything other than bullet-holes; but they had been made long before,—probably ten or twelve years.

My guide had hardly finished knocking, when the

door opened — not timidly, hesitatingly, and half-way, but wide open — and a valet appeared.

I am wrong when I say a valet; I ought to say a man.

The livery is what makes the valet, and the person who opened the door to us was clad in a velvet coat, breeches of the same, and leather gaiters. The breeches were held up by a belt of parti-colored silk, from which protruded the hilt of a dagger of Spanish make.

"My friend," said I, "is it inconsiderate of a stranger who knows nobody in Sullacaro to ask your mistress to accommodate me with a night's lodging?"

"Certainly not, Excellency," he replied; "the stranger honors the house at which he stops. Maria," he continued, turning to a maid who was peering over his shoulder, "inform Madame Savilia that it is a French traveller, and that he asks to be put up for the night."

As he spoke he descended a flight of eight steps, as steep as the rounds of a ladder, and took my horse by the bridle.

I jumped to the ground.

"Your Excellency need have no anxiety about anything," said he; "all your luggage will be taken to your room."

I took advantage of this courteous invitation to be lazy, — one of the most agreeable invitations that could be extended to a traveller.

CHAPTER II.

I LOST no time in mounting the ladder aforesaid, and entered the house.

At a turn in the corridor I found myself face to face with a woman above middle height, dressed in black. I at once concluded that this woman, apparently some thirty-eight to forty years of age, and still beautiful, was the mistress of the house, and I stopped before her.

"Madame," said I, bowing, "you must think it very inconsiderate on my part; but the custom of the island is my excuse, and your servant's invitation accounts for my appearance at this moment."

"You are welcome, so far as the mother is concerned," replied Madame de Franchi, "and my son will be here directly to echo my sentiments. From this moment, monsieur, the house belongs to you; make use of it, and all it contains, as if it were your own."

"I ask your hospitality for one night only, madame. To-morrow morning, at daybreak, I shall take my leave."

"You are at liberty to do as you think best, monsieur. I trust, however, that you will change your mind, and that we shall have the honor of keeping you with us longer than you say."

I bowed a second time.

"Maria," continued Madame de Franchi, "take Monsieur to Louis's room. Light a fire at once, and bring some hot water. Pardon me," she said, turning to me again, while the servant was making ready to follow

her instructions; "I know that the things a weary traveller needs first of all are fire and water. Be good enough to follow the maid, monsieur. Ask her for whatever you lack. We have supper in an hour; and my son, who will be at home before then, will have the honor of asking your leave to visit you."

"You will excuse my travelling costume, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur," she replied with a smile, "on condition that you will excuse our countrified way of receiving you."

The maid started upstairs. I bowed once more, and followed her.

The room to which she escorted me was on the first floor, at the back of the house. The windows looked upon a pretty little garden, thickly planted with myrtle and oleanders, and crossed obliquely by a lovely stream which emptied into the Tavoro.

At the end of the garden the view was cut off by a sort of hedge of fir-trees, so close together as almost to form a wall. As in almost all Italian houses, the walls of the room were whitewashed, and adorned with frescos representing landscapes.

I at once understood that this room, which belonged to the son who was absent, had been given to me, as being the most comfortable in the house.

It occurred to me, while Maria was lighting my fire and getting the water ready, to take an inventory of the contents of my apartment, and try to form an idea of the character of its occupant.

I at once set about putting my plan in operation, revolving about on my left heel in such a way as to pass in review, one after another, the various objects by which I was surrounded.

The furniture was all modern, which was in itself a

surprising circumstance in that part of the island, where civilization had not then penetrated. It consisted of an iron bedstead with three mattresses and a pillow, a sofa, four easy-chairs, six common chairs, a double bookcase, and a bureau,—all of mahogany, and evidently procured from the best cabinet-maker in Ajaccio.

The sofa and all the chairs were covered with flowered cretonne, and curtains of the same stuff hung at the windows and around the bed.

I had gone thus far in my inventory when Maria left the room, and enabled me to carry my investigations farther.

I opened the bookcase, and found therein the works of all our great poets, — Corneille, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, Ronsard, Victor Hugo, and Lamartine; of our moral philosophers, — Montaigne, Pascal, La Bruyère; of our historians, — Mézeray, Châteaubriand, Augustin Thierry; of our scientists, — Cuvier, Beudant, Elie de Beaumont; in addition, a few volumes of novels, among which I recognized, with some pride, my own "*Impressions de Voyage*."

The keys were in the bureau drawers, and I opened one of them.

I found therein some fragments of a history of Corsica, a study of the means to be adopted to abolish the vendetta, some French verses, and some Italian sonnets,—all in manuscript. This was all, and more than I required; and I was presumptuous enough to believe that I had no need to pursue my investigations, in order to form an accurate opinion of M. Louis de Franchi. He should be, I thought, an attractive young fellow, of studious habits, and an ardent partisan of the reforms undertaken by the French government. And I understood why he had gone to Paris with the purpose of

adopting the legal profession; he doubtless dreamed of civilizing his native island by his efforts.

I made these and other reflections while I was dressing. My costume, although not entirely lacking in picturesqueness, called for some indulgence, as I had said to Madame de Franchi. It consisted of a black velvet coat, with seams open to the elbow, so as to let the air reach my arm during the heat of the day. The sleeves had the effect of being slashed in the Spanish style, and a striped silk shirt showed underneath. My breeches were also of black velvet, and were continued from the knee to the ankle by Spanish gaiters, slit on the side, and embroidered with colored silks. A felt hat, which could be made to assume any shape, but lent itself particularly well to the sombrero style, completed my costume, which I particularly commend to travellers as one of the most convenient I know.

I was just putting on the finishing touches when my door opened, and the same man who had received me at first appeared.

He came, he said, to inform me that his young master, M. Lucien de Franchi, had just returned, and desired to have the honor of calling upon me to bid me welcome, provided that I was ready to receive him.

I replied that I was entirely at M. Lucien's service, and that all the honor would be mine.

A moment later I heard a quick step in the hall, and almost immediately my host stood before me.

CHAPTER III.

HE was, as my guide had said, a young man of twenty or twenty-one years, with black hair and eyes, skin tanned by the sun, rather below middle height, but extremely well set up.

In his haste to present his compliments, he had come upstairs just as he was, — in a riding-costume composed of a green cloth coat, to which a cartridge-belt around his waist gave a certain military flavor, gray breeches, lined with Russia leather, riding boots with spurs, and a cap like those worn by our Chasseurs d'Afrique.

From one side of his belt dangled a flask, and from the other a pistol, while he carried an English rifle in his hand.

Despite his youth, — and there was merely the least suspicion of a mustache on his upper lip, — there was in his whole bearing an air of independence and decision of character which greatly struck me.

He seemed a man brought up to bear his part in rough combats, accustomed to live amid danger without fearing, but also without despising it; of serious mien because of his solitary life, and calm in the consciousness of his own strength.

In a single look he took in everything, — my satchel, my weapons, the coat I had taken off, and the one I was wearing. His glance was as swift and sure as that of every man whose life sometimes depends upon a glance.

"I know you will forgive me if I disturb you, monsieur," said he, "for I have done so with a good object,

— to find out whether you have everything you need. I always have a certain amount of uneasiness when I have the pleasure of entertaining a guest from the Continent; for we Corsicans are still so barbarous and uncouth that it is only in fear and trembling that we put in practice, especially with Frenchmen, the old-fashioned hospitality which will soon be the last remaining tradition of our fathers.”

“But you need have no such fear, monsieur,” I replied. “It would be difficult to anticipate a traveller’s every need more fully than Madame de Franchi has done. Besides,” I continued, glancing significantly around, “this is no place for me to complain of the barbarous manners which you describe. If it were not for the charming landscape I see from these windows, I might easily imagine that I was in a room on the Chaussée d’Antin.”

“Yes,” the young man rejoined, “it was a mania with my poor brother Louis to live *à la française*; but I doubt whether this poor parody of civilization will satisfy him, when he returns from Paris, so fully as it did before he went away.”

“Is it long since your brother left Corsica?” I inquired.

“Ten months, monsieur.”

“And you expect him home again soon?”

“Oh, not for three or four years.”

“That is a long separation for two brothers who were never apart before, I fancy.”

“Yes, especially when they are so deeply attached to one another as we are.”

“Of course he will come to see you before his studies are completed?”

“Probably, — at least he has promised to do so.”

"At all events, there is nothing to prevent your going to pay him a visit, is there?"

"I? Oh, I never leave Corsica."

There was in the tone in which this was said, that sublime love of country which views the balance of the universe with the same supreme contempt.

I smiled.

"It seems strange to you," he rejoined, smiling back at me, "that I should have no desire to leave a wretched country like this of ours. But what would you have? I am, in a measure, indigenous here, like the holly and the oleander. I must live in an atmosphere impregnated with the odors of the sea and the mountain breezes. I must have torrents to cross, cliffs to scale, forests to explore. I must have plenty of space and perfect freedom. If I were to be set down in a crowded city, it seems to me that I should die."

"Pray, how does it happen that there is such a vast difference, morally speaking, between your brother and yourself?"

"Especially when the physical resemblance is so marked, you would add, if you knew him."

"Are you much alike, then?"

"So much, that when we were children our father and mother had to make marks on our clothes, to tell us apart."

"How was it as you grew up?" I asked.

"As we grew up, our different habits made our complexions vary a little, that's all. Always shut up in the house, forever leaning over his books and his drawings, my brother grew paler and paler; while I, on the other hand, being always in the open air, always climbing mountains or riding around the country, got brown as an Indian."

"I trust," said I, "that you will enable me to judge of the difference by intrusting me with any messages you may have for M. Louis de Franchi."

"We certainly will, with very great pleasure, if you care to do us that favor. But excuse me; I see that you are much farther advanced in your toilet than I, and we shall be expected at the table in quarter of an hour."

"Are you going to take the trouble to change your clothes on my account?"

"Even if that were the case, you would have only yourself to blame, for you have set the example; but you see, I am in riding costume, and I must put on a mountaineering suit. I have a little errand to do after supper, in which my boots and spurs would be much in the way."

"Are you going out after supper?" I inquired.

"Yes," was the reply; "an appointment —"

I smiled.

"Oh, not in the sense in which you take it. It's a business appointment."

"Would you think me very presumptuous if I should ask you to confide in me?"

"Why should I? We should live so that we can afford to say aloud whatever we do. I never had a mistress, and never shall have. If my brother marries and has children, I probably shall remain single; but if he does not marry, then I must. In that case, it will be simply to perpetuate the family. I told you, you know," he added with a smile, "that I am a downright barbarian, and I was born a hundred years too late. But here I am, chattering away like a magpie; and at this rate I shall not be ready for supper."

"But we can keep on talking," said I. "Is n't your

room opposite this? Leave the door open, and we can talk."

"We can do better than that. Do you come to my room. I will dress in my dressing-room; and meanwhile— You have a taste for weapons, I fancy, and you can be looking at mine. There are some among them which have some value,—historically, I mean."

CHAPTER IV.

THE suggestion fell in too neatly with my desire to compare the rooms of the two brothers to be declined. I at once followed my host, who opened the door of his apartment, and escorted me in.

This time it seemed as if I were entering an arsenal, pure and simple. All the furniture was of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The bed, with an ornamented canopy supported by heavy twisted posts, had draperies of gold-flowered green damask, and the window-curtains were of the same material. The walls were covered with Spanish leather, and every space was filled with weapons of all sorts, — Gothic and modern.

There was no mistaking the tastes of the occupant of that room. They were as warlike as his brother's were peaceful.

"Now," said he, as he went into his dressing-room, "here you are in the midst of three centuries. Look around. I am going to dress myself as a mountaineer, as I told you, for I must go out immediately after supper."

"Which ones, among all these swords, arquebuses, and rapiers, are of historical interest?"

"There are three such. Let us take them in order. Look over my pillow for a dagger, which hangs by itself, shaped like a shell, and with a seal on the hilt."

"I have it. What is its history?"

"It is Sampietro's dagger."

"The celebrated Sampietro, the assassin of Vanina?"

"The assassin! No, the murderer."

"That's a distinction without a difference, I should say."

"Perhaps so, in the rest of the world, but not in Corsica."

"Is its identity beyond question?"

"Look! It has the Sampietro arms, only the *fleur-de-lis* of France is not included. You know that Sampietro was n't authorized to put the *fleur-de-lis* into his crest until after the siege of Perpignan."

"No; I was ignorant of that fact. How did the dagger come to your hands?"

"Oh, it's been in the family three hundred years. It was given to one Napoléon de Franchi by Sampietro himself."

"Do you know on what occasion?"

"Yes. Sampietro and my ancestor fell into a Genoese ambush together, and fought like lions. Sampietro's helmet became loosened, and a Genoese horseman was on the point of striking him down with his mace, when my ancestor buried his dagger in his side, as he had no shield. The horseman, feeling that he was wounded, drove the spurs into his horse, and fled, carrying off Napoléon's dagger, which was buried so deep in the wound that he could n't pull it out. Now, my ancestor seems to have set great store by his dagger, and deeply regretted its loss; so Sampietro gave him his. Napoléon lost nothing by the transaction; for this, as you see, is of Spanish make, and will pierce through two five-franc pieces laid one on top of the other."

"May I try it?"

"Most certainly you may."

I placed two five-franc pieces on the floor and struck a quick, powerful blow, and found that Lucien had

said no more than the truth. When I raised the dagger, the two pieces were attached to the point, pierced through and through.

"Well, well," said I; "it must indeed be Sampietro's dagger. But why, in Heaven's name, with such a weapon as this, did he use a cord to kill his wife?"

"He did n't have the dagger then," said Lucien, "for he had given it to my ancestor."

"True."

"Sampietro was over sixty when he returned, in haste, from Constantinople to Aix, to teach the world the great lesson that it is not for women to meddle in politics."

I bowed assentingly, and returned the poniard to its place.

"Now," said I to Lucien, who was dressing all the while, "Sampietro's dagger is on its nail. Let us pass to the next."

"Do you see two portraits side by side?"

"Yes; Paoli and Napoléon."

"Very well; there is a sword near Paoli's portrait."

"There is."

"It is his."

"Paoli's sword! And as well authenticated as Sampietro's dagger?"

"Quite so; for it, also, was given, not to an ancestor, but to an ancestress of mine."

"To an ancestress?"

"Yes. You may have heard of the woman who made her appearance at the tower of Sullacaro, accompanied by a young man, just at the time of the war of independence?"

"No. Tell me the story."

"It's quite short."

"So much the worse."

"Oh, we have n't time for much chatter."

"I am listening."

"Well, this woman and young man presented themselves at the tower of Sullacaro, requesting speech of Paoli. But as he was busy writing, they were refused admission; and when the woman persisted, the two sentries put her out. Meanwhile Paoli, who had heard the noise, opened the door, and asked who had caused it.

" 'I,' said the woman; 'for I wanted to speak to you.'

" 'What do you want to say to me?'

" 'I want to say that I had two sons. I learned yesterday that the older was killed while defending his native country, and I have travelled twenty leagues to bring you the other.' "

"That sounds like an anecdote of Sparta."

"Yes, there is a Spartan flavor to it."

"Who was the woman? "

"She was my ancestress. Paoli took off his sword, and gave it to her."

"Look you, I like that way of apologizing to a woman."

"She was worthy of anything, was n't she? "

"Now, what is there to say about this sabre? "

"It's the one Bonaparte wore at the battle of the Pyramids."

"It came into your family, doubtless, in the same way as the dagger and the sword? "

"Precisely. After the battle, Bonaparte ordered my grandfather, who was an officer of infantry, to charge, with fifty men, a little knot of Mamelukes who were gathered around a wounded chief. My grandfather obeyed, dispersed the Mamelukes, and brought the chief back to the First Consul. But when he tried to sheath his sword, the blade was so hacked up by

the weapons of the Mamelukes that he could n't get it into the scabbard. He threw sword and scabbard both away, whereupon Bonaparte gave him his."

"But," said I, "if I were you, I should much prefer to have my grandfather's weapon, all hacked up as it was, rather than that of the commanding general's, which he had kept so carefully from injury."

"Look right in front of you, and you will find it. The First Consul picked it up, had the diamond inserted in the hilt, as you see, and sent it to my family, with the inscription you can read on the blade."

In truth, between the two windows, half protruding from the scabbard, which it could not be made to enter, hung the hacked and twisted sabre, with this simple inscription:—

Bataille des Pyramides, 21 Juillet, 1798.

At this moment the same servant whom I first saw, and who came to announce his young master's arrival, appeared at the door.

"Excellency," he said to Lucien, "Madame de Franchi sends word to you that supper is served."

"All right, Griffo," replied the young man. "Tell my mother we are coming down at once."

As he spoke, he came out of the dressing-room, dressed, as he said, in mountaineering costume, with a round velvet coat, breeches, and gaiters. Of his previous outfit he retained nothing save the belt at his waist.

He found me looking inquiringly at two rifles, hanging opposite each other. Each had this date inlaid on the butt:—

21 September, 1819 — Eleven o'clock, A. M.

"Have these rifles a history of their own, too?" I asked.

"Yes," said he; "for us, at least. One is my father's."

There he stopped.

"And the other?" I said.

"The other," he said, with a laugh, — "the other is my mother's. But let's go down; she's waiting for us you know."

He left the room first, to show the way, and I followed him.

CHAPTER V.

I CONFESS that I descended the stairs with my mind full of Lucien's last sentence, — "That rifle is my mother's."

Therefore I looked at Madame de Franchi with even more interest than at my first interview with her.

Her son, as he entered the dining-room, kissed her hand respectfully, and she received that mark of homage with the dignity of a queen.

"Excuse me, mother," said Lucien; "I'm afraid I've kept you waiting."

"It's my fault, though, madame," I said, saluting her; "M. Lucien has been showing me such curious and interesting things that I delayed him by my endless questions."

"Don't be disturbed about that," she said to me, "for I just this moment came down myself; but I was in a great hurry to see you, my son," she said to Lucien, "to ask you about Louis."

"Is your son ill?" I asked.

"Lucien fears that he is," she replied.

"Have you had a letter from your brother?" I inquired of the young man.

"No," said he, "and that is why I am particularly anxious about him."

"But how do you know that he is ill?"

"Because I have been ill myself for a few days past."

"Pardon my everlasting inquisitiveness, but that does n't account —"

"Don't you know that we are twins?"

"Yes, my guide told me so."

"Don't you know that when we came into the world, we were joined together at the side?"

"No, I did n't know that."

"Well, that was the case, and we had to be cut apart. The consequence is, that no matter how far apart we may be, we still have, in a sense, the same body; so that every impression, physical or mental, which either of us experiences, is at once reproduced in the other. Now, for the last day or two, I have been blue and dull and morose, without any apparent reason; I have had a terrible heart-ache, and it is clear to me that my brother must be in some great trouble."

I gazed in wonder at this youth, who made such an extraordinary statement without the slightest apparent doubt of its reasonableness and truth; his mother, too, seemed to share his conviction.

She smiled sadly, and said, —

"The absent are in God's hand. The main thing is that you are sure he is still living."

"If he were dead," said Lucien, calmly, "I should have seen him."

"And you would have told me, would n't you, my son?"

"Oh, on the instant, mother, I promise you."

"That's right. Pardon me, monsieur," she continued, turning to me, "for my inability to repress my maternal anxiety before you. You see, not only are Lucien and Louis my sons, but they are the last of their name. Be good enough to take a seat at my right; Lucien, do you sit there," she said, pointing to the vacant place at her left.

We seated ourselves at the end of a long table; six

covers were laid at the other end, for those who compose what is called in Corsica the "family," — that is to say, those individuals, who occupy a middle position, in great houses, between the masters and the servants.

The table was copiously laden; but I confess that although I was ravenously hungry, I contented myself with simply satisfying my physical need of food, for my mind was too deeply absorbed in my surroundings to permit me to take any pleasure in gastronomic delicacies. Indeed, it seemed to me as if, when I entered that house, I had entered a strange world, in which I was living as in a dream.

What manner of woman was this who had her own rifle like a soldier?

What was I to think of this brother, who felt every pain and every sorrow that was felt by his brother three hundred leagues away?

What of this mother who made her son swear to tell her if he should see her other son dead?

There is no denying that there was ample material for a dream in all this that had happened to me.

Meanwhile, I realized that my continued silence was discourteous, so I raised my head, and shook it to expel all such thoughts.

The mother and son at once perceived that I wished to join in the conversation.

"So you made up your mind to come to Corsica?" said Lucien, as if resuming an interrupted conversation.

"Yes, as you see; for a long time I have been meaning to come, and at last I have got here."

"Faith! you did well not to put it off much longer; for before many years, with the continual encroachment of French tastes and customs, they who come here in search of Corsica will find nothing left of it."

"At all events," I rejoined, "if the old national spirit retreats before advancing civilization, and takes refuge in some corner of the island, it will certainly be in the province of Sartène and the valley of the Tavoro."

"Do you think so?" said the young man, with a smile.

"Why, it seems to me that I have all about me here, right before my eyes indeed, a beautiful and noble picture of the old Corsican manners."

"True; and yet, in the face of four hundred years of souvenirs, in this very house, with its embrasures and spiked windows, the French spirit has stepped in, and carried my brother off from between my mother and myself, and taken him to Paris, whence he will return a lawyer. He will live at Ajaccio, instead of in the house of his fathers; he will plead causes; if he exhibits talent and learning, he may be appointed *procureur du roi*; then he will prosecute the poor devils who have *made a skin*, as the saying is; he will confuse the assassin with the murderer, as you yourself did; he will ask, in the name of the law, for the heads of those who have done what their fathers would have considered it dishonorable not to do; he will substitute man's decree for God's; and in the evening, when he has enlisted a new recruit for the executioner, he will fancy he has served his country, — has contributed his stone to the temple of civilization, as our prefect says. Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*"

He raised his eyes to the ceiling, as Hannibal might have done after the battle of Zama.

"But," I replied, "you see that God has kept the scales even, by making you an ardent partisan of the old customs, while he has made of your brother a votary of the new ideas."

"Very good; but who can tell me that my brother will not follow his uncle's example instead of mine? And as for myself, how many things I allow myself to do that are utterly unworthy of a De Franchi!"

"You?" I cried in amazement.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes,—I, myself. Would you like me to tell you what you have come to seek in the province of Sartène?"

"Yes."

"You have come with the curiosity of a man of the world; an artist, perhaps, or a poet. I don't know what you are, nor do I ask you. You will tell us, when you take your leave, if you choose, or you may keep your own counsel; you are perfectly free. You have come with the hope of seeing some village where the vendetta was in active operation,—of coming in contact with some extraordinary bandit like those M. Merimée has described in his '*Colomba*.'"

"Well, I should say that, in that case, I had not had such bad luck," I rejoined; "for unless I am much mistaken, yours is the only unfortified house in the village."

"Which proves that I, too, am degenerating: my father, my great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather, any one of my ancestors, in short, would have taken sides with one or the other of the factions into which the village has been divided for ten years. But do you know what my position is in all this, amid the rifle-shots, and the dagger and knife thrusts? I am umpire—God save the mark! You came to the province of Sartène to see bandits, did you not? Well, come with me this evening, and I will show you one."

"What! you will allow me to go with you?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes, if it will entertain you; it's for you to say."

"Bless my soul! then I accept, with the greatest pleasure."

"Monsieur is very tired," said Madame de Franchi, glancing at her son, as if she shared his shame at the thought of Corsica having become so degenerate.

"No, mother, no, he must come; and when, in some Parisian drawing-room, any one undertakes to talk in Monsieur's presence of these terrible vendettas, and these implacable Corsican bandits who frighten the babies of Ajaccio and Bastia, he can at least shrug his shoulders, and tell the truth about it."

"Pray, what was the motive of this great quarrel, which is on the point of being finally adjusted, if I may judge from what you say?"

"Oh," said Lucien, "in one of our quarrels the motive is of no consequence; it's the result. If a fly causes a man's death by brushing against him, there's a man dead all the same."

I saw that he had some hesitation about telling me the cause of the terrible warfare which had laid waste the village of Sullacaro for ten years. But, as can readily be understood, the more cautious he became, the more I persisted.

"But the quarrel must have had a motive," said I. "Is it a secret?"

"*Mon Dieu!* no. It started between the Orlandi and the Colona."

"What started it?"

"Oh, a chicken got out of the Orlandi barnyard, and flew into the Colona's. The Orlandi went after it, and the Colona maintained that it was theirs; the Orlandi threatened to summon the Colona before the *juge de paix*, and put them on oath. Thereupon the old woman who had the chicken in her hands, twisted its neck, and threw it in her neighbor's face, saying:—

" 'Oh, well, if it's yours, eat it.' "

" Then an Orlandi picked it up by the claws, and undertook to strike the woman who threw it in his sister's face. But just as he raised his hand, a Colona, who unfortunately had his gun all loaded, fired at him, and killed him. "

" How many lives have been sacrificed as the result of that affair ? "

" There have been nine killed. "

" And all for a wretched chicken, worth a dozen sous. "

" Exactly ; but, as I just told you, it's not the cause, but the result, which counts. "

" And because there have been nine persons killed, is it necessary that there should be a tenth ? "

" Why, no, as you can see by their making me umpire. "

" At the request of one of the families, no doubt ? "

" *Mon Dieu !* no ; at the request of my brother, who was spoken to on the subject by the Keeper of the Seals. Now, I ask you to tell me what the devil they are about at Paris, to bother their heads about what is going on in a wretched little Corsican village. It was the prefect who played this trick on us by writing to Paris that, if I chose to say the word, all this would come to an end, like a comic opera, with a marriage, and a couplet or two addressed to the public ; thereupon they applied to my brother, who seized the opportunity, and wrote me that he had given his word for me. What would you have," the young man added, raising his head ; " I could n't let it be said that a De Franchi had engaged his word for his brother, and that the brother had failed to abide by the engagement. "

" So you have arranged everything ? "

" I 'm afraid so ! "

"And to-night we are to see the leader of one of the sides, I fancy."

"Just so; last night I saw the other."

"Are we to call upon an Orlandi or a Colona to-night?"

"An Orlandi."

"Is the rendezvous far from here?"

"In the ruins of the Château of Vicentello d'Istria."

"Ah, yes! I was told that those ruins were in this neighborhood."

"About a league from here."

"We can be there, then, in three quarters of an hour?"

"At the outside."

"Lucien," said Madame de Franchi, "remember that you are speaking for yourself. A mountaineer like you, requires only three quarters of an hour for it; but monsieur can't go over some of the paths that you do."

"To be sure; it will take us at least an hour and a half."

"There's no time to lose, then," said Madame de Franchi, glancing at the clock.

"Mother," said Lucien, "will you allow us to take our leave?"

She held out her hand, which the young man kissed with the same deep respect as when we entered the room.

"If you prefer, now," said Lucien, "to finish your supper in peace, go up to your room and toast your feet, and smoke a cigar—"

"No indeed! no indeed!" I cried. "The devil! you promised me a bandit, and I must have him."

"All right; let us get our rifles, then, and be off."

I saluted Madame de Franchi courteously, and we left the room, preceded by Griffo, who held a light.

Our preparations were soon made.

I put on a travelling belt which I had had made in Paris, to which a hunting-knife was attached, and which held powder on one side and shot on the other.

Lucien reappeared with his cartridge-belt, a Manton double-barrelled gun, and a peaked cap,—a master-piece of embroidery, presumably the handiwork of some Sullacaro Penelope.

"Shall I go with your Excellency?" Griffo inquired.

"No, there's no need," Lucien replied; "but let Diamante out. We may possibly start up a pheasant, and in this bright moonlight we can shoot as well as at noonday."

A moment after, a great spaniel was leaping around us, yelping with delight.

We were just starting away from the house, when Lucien turned back for a moment.

"By the way," said he, "just say to the village folk that if they hear a shot or two in the mountains, we shall have fired them."

"Never fear, Excellency."

"If I did n't take that precaution," said Lucien to me, "they might think that hostilities had broken out again, and we should hear the echo of our shots in the streets of Sullacaro."

We walked on a few steps, then took a little lane to the right, which led straight to the mountain.

CHAPTER VI.

ALTHOUGH it was still very early in March, the weather was superb; it might have been called warm, except for a delicious breeze, which blew refreshingly upon us, laden with the sharp, invigorating odor of the sea.

The moon rose, clear and brilliant, behind Cagna mountain; and it was as if she were pouring cascades of light upon the slopes of that range which divides Corsica in halves, and makes, as it were, of a single island, two distinct countries, which are always at war, or which, at least, always bitterly detest one another.

As we ascended, and while the gorges through which the Tavoro flows were buried in black darkness which the eye vainly sought to penetrate, the Mediterranean, as calm and peaceful as a vast mirror of polished steel, gradually came into view on the horizon.

Certain sounds which are heard only at night, either because they are swallowed up by other sounds during the day, or because they really awake with the coming of darkness, fell upon our ears, and produced — not upon Lucien, who was familiar with them and knew what they were, but upon me, to whom they were entirely novel — a curious feeling of surprise, and kept my mind in that state of constant excitement, which makes one take a lively interest in the most trifling occurrences.

When we reached a sort of fork, where the road divided into two, one of which seemed to make the circuit of the mountain, while the other, a very blind path, went straight ahead, Lucien halted.

"Tell me," said he, "have you the mountaineer's sure foot?"

"Yes, but not the eye."

"You mean that you are subject to vertigo?"

"Yes; space has an irresistible attraction for me."

"Then we can take this path, where there are no precipices, but only hard travelling."

"Oh, I don't mind that, in the least."

"We will take the path, then, for it will save us three quarters of an hour's walk."

"The path it is."

Lucien plunged into a little thicket of evergreens, with me close at his heels.

Diamante kept within fifty or sixty paces, beating up the woods on both sides, and occasionally coming and looking up into our faces, wagging his tail encouragingly, as if to say that we might trust to his instinct and pursue our journey without fear.

Diamante, you see, was all ready to hunt either biped or quadruped, bandit or wild boar,—like the all-around horses of the would-be fashionables, who are money-lenders in the morning and heavy swells in the evening, and have a riding and driving beast all in one.

In order that I might not seem wholly insensible to Corsican manners, I communicated the result of my observation to Lucien.

"You are wrong," he said. "Diamante, to be sure, will hunt both men and animals, but the men that he hunts are not bandits, but gendarmes, light-horse, and volunteers."

"Oho! Diamante is a bandit's dog then, is he?"

"That's just what he is. He used to belong to one of the Orlandi, to whose retreat I sometimes sent bread and powder and shot,—in short, whatever a bandit needs.

He was killed by a Colona, and I received his dog the next day; he was in the habit of coming to the house, and soon made friends with me."

"But I have an impression that I saw, from the window of my room (or your brother's), a different dog from Diamante."

"Yes, that's Brusco. He has the same qualities as this one, only he came from a Colona, who was slain by an Orlandi; consequently, when I am going to meet a Colona I take Brusco, and when I have business with one of the Orlandi, Diamante is always my companion. If they should accidentally get loose at the same time, they would eat one another up. So you see," he continued with a bitter smile, "though men may be reconciled, make their peace with one another, and receive communion at the same altar, the dogs can never be made to eat out of the same dish."

"Upon my word," I rejoined, laughingly, "they're genuine Corsican dogs. But it seems that Diamante, like all modest folk, has withdrawn out of reach of our praise; since we have been talking about him, he has disappeared."

"Oh, don't let that disturb you," said Lucien. "I know where he is."

"May I venture to ask where?"

"He's at the *mucchio*."

I was about to venture upon another question at the risk of wearying my companion, when there came a howl so melancholy, so doleful, and so long drawn out, that I involuntarily jumped, and stopped short, laying my hand upon the young man's arm.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing; Diamante mourning, that's all."

"Whom is he mourning for, pray?"

"His master. Do you imagine that dogs are like men, and forget those who have loved them?"

"Ah, yes; I understand."

Diamante here uttered another howl, even more melancholy, more dolorous, and more prolonged than the first.

"Yes," I went on, "his master was killed, you told me, and we must be nearing the spot."

"Precisely, and Diamante left us to visit the *mucchio*."

"Is the *mucchio* a tomb then?"

"Yes; that is to say, it is the monument which is formed over the grave of every assassinated man, by the rocks and branches of trees thrown upon it by every one who passes. The consequence is that, instead of being worn away like other burial mounds by the passage of that great leveller called Time, the victim's tomb is ever growing,—a fitting symbol of the vengeance which lives after him,—and grows incessantly in the hearts of his nearest and dearest."

A third howl was heard, this time so near us that I could not repress a shudder, although I was perfectly well aware of its cause.

Just then, we reached a sharp bend in the path, and I saw a heap of white stones some twenty paces away, forming a pyramid four or five feet high. It was the *mucchio*.

At the foot of this strange monument, Diamante was sitting with his head thrown back, and his mouth wide open. Lucien picked up a stone, and drew near the *mucchio*, cap in hand.

I did the same, copying his actions in every point.

When we reached the pyramid, he broke off a branch of holly, and threw first the stone, and then the branch, upon the pile. Then he made with his thumb that quick

sign of the cross, which is a Corsican habit, if there is such a thing, and which Napoleon himself was seen to make at certain terrible crises.

I imitated him from beginning to end.

Then we resumed our journey in silence, both lost in thought.

Diamante remained behind.

About ten minutes later we heard a last, long howl, and almost immediately, Diamante, with head and tail hanging, passed us, and when he was about a hundred paces ahead, resumed his duties as scout.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE, we were still pushing on, and, as Lucien had warned me, the path became steeper and steeper.

I slung my gun over my shoulder, for I saw that I should soon need both hands; my guide, on the other hand, walked along with the same easy stride, and hardly seemed to notice the difficulties of the road.

After some moments passed in scaling steep cliffs, and hauling ourselves up with the assistance of roots and creeping vines, we finally reached a sort of platform, overlooked by the crumbling walls of an ancient structure. They were the ruins of the Château Vicentello d'Istria, which were the goal we had set out to reach.

Five minutes more of climbing, still steeper and more difficult, and Lucien, standing upon the last terrace, gave me his hand, and pulled me up beside him.

"Well, well," said he, "you have n't done badly for a Parisian."

"That's because this particular Parisian, whom you just helped to make his last spring, has already made several excursions of this sort."

"Oh, yes," said Lucien, laughingly, "you have a mountain near Paris, called Montmartre, have n't you?"

"Yes, but besides Montmartre, which is not to be despised, I have climbed several other mountains,—the Righi, for instance, and the Faulhorn, the Gemmi, Vesuvius, Stromboli, and Etna."

"Oho! After all, then, it's for you to despise me, because I have never climbed anything but Monte Rotondo. However, here we are. Four centuries ago,

my ancestors would have thrown the door open and said, 'Welcome to our château.' To-day their descendant shows you that broken-down, crumbling wall, and says, 'Welcome to our ruins.' "

"Has this château belonged to your family since the death of Vicentello d'Istria?" I inquired, resuming the conversation where we had left it.

"No; but it belonged to us before he was born. It was the dwelling of our first ancestress,—the famous Savilia, widow of Lucien de Franchi."

"Is n't there a terrible story about her in Filippini?"

"Yes. If it were daylight, you could see from here the ruins of the Château de Valle; that is where the Seigneur de Guidice lived, who was as bitterly detested as she was dearly loved, and as ugly as she was lovely. He fell in love with her; and as she was slow to respond to his passion in accordance with his wishes, he sent word to her that, if she did not make up her mind within a given time to take him for her husband, he would carry her off by force. Savilia pretended to yield, and invited Guidice to dine with her. He, overjoyed at his success, and forgetting that he had only achieved such a flattering result by the use of threats, accepted the invitation, and took with him no one but a retainer or two. The door was closed upon them, and five minutes later Guidice was a prisoner in a dungeon."

I took the direction Lucien indicated, and found myself in a sort of square courtyard.

Through the breaches in the wall, which the hand of time had made, the moon shone upon the ground, which was littered up with rubbish, making great patches of light. All the remaining portion of the enclosure was in the shadow thrown by those pieces of wall which were still standing.

Lucien took out his watch.

"Ah," said he, "we are twenty minutes ahead of time. Sit down; you must be tired."

We sat, or rather lay down upon a grassy slope, directly opposite a wide breach in the wall.

"I don't think you have told me the whole story, have you?" said I.

"No," Lucien replied. "Every morning and every evening, Savilia went down into the dungeon adjoining the one where Guidice was confined, and there, separated from him by nought but a grating, she would undress, and show herself to the captive, *in puris naturalibus*.

"'Guidice,' she would say, 'how could such an ill-favored brute as you are ever imagine that he could win such a one as I?'

"This torture lasted three months, renewed twice each day. But at the end of that time, Guidice succeeded in making his escape, with the assistance of a servant-girl whom he bribed. He returned with all his retainers, who were much more numerous than Savilia's, took the château by assault, and having made Savilia his prisoner, he exposed her to public view, quite naked, in a great iron cage, at a cross-road in the forest called Bocca di Cilaccia, and himself offered the key of the cage to every passer-by who was attracted by her beauty. After three days of this public mortification, Savilia was dead."

"Well, upon my soul, I should say that your ancestors were adepts at devising unique forms of vengeance, and that their descendants, who simply kill each other with a rifle-ball, or a thrust of the dagger, are sadly degenerate."

"To say nothing of their rapidly nearing a time when they won't kill one another at all. But, at all events," the youth added, "that has n't been the case in our

family. Savilia's two sons, who were at Ajaccio under their uncle's guardianship, were reared as true Corsicans, and waged relentless war on the sons of Guidice. The feud lasted four centuries, and only came to an end, as you saw on the rifles of my father and mother, on the 21st September, 1819, at eleven in the morning."

"I remember that inscription, but I had n't time to ask you to explain it; for we went down to dinner just as I read it."

"This is it. Of the Guidice family there remained, in 1819, only two brothers; of the Franchi family, my father, who had married his cousin, was the only one left. Three months after that marriage, the Guidice resolved to make an end of us at a single stroke. One of the brothers lay in ambush on the Olmeto road to wait for my father, who was to return from Sartène, while the other was to take advantage of my father's absence to attack the house. The plan was carried out as arranged, but turned out altogether differently from what they anticipated. My father, who had been warned, was on his guard; while my mother, whose suspicions had also been aroused, got all the shepherds together, so that every one was on the alert when the double attack was made,—my father on the mountain, and my mother in what is now my room. After five minutes' fighting in either place, both the Guidice brothers fell, one shot by my father, the other by my mother. When he saw his foe fall, my father looked at his watch; *it was eleven o'clock!* When my mother saw her assailant fall, she glanced at the clock; *it was just eleven!* Both shots had been fired at the same minute. There were no more of the name of Guidice; the race was extinct.

"The Franchi family finally triumphant, lived in peace thereafter; and as it had done its work worthily during

those four centuries, it took no part in any feuds thereafter. My father had the day and hour of the fortunate event engraved upon the butt of each of the rifles which had contributed to it, and hung them on either side of the clock, just where you saw them. Seven months after, my mother was brought to bed with twins, one of whom was your humble servant, Lucien the Corsican, the other Louis, the philanthropist, his brother."

As he finished speaking, I saw the shadows of a man and a dog fall across one of the patches of moonlight. They were the shadows of the bandit Orlandi and our friend Diamante.

At the same time we heard the clock at Sullacaro slowly striking nine.

Master Orlandi was apparently of the opinion of Louis XV., whose maxim was, as is well known, that punctuality is a king's courtesy.

It was impossible to be more punctual than this king of the mountains, with whom Lucien had made an appointment for nine o'clock.

We both rose to our feet as we perceived him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AREN'T you alone, Monsieur Lucien?" said the bandit.

"Don't be alarmed about that, Orlandi. Monsieur is a friend of mine who has heard of you, and was anxious to pay you a visit. I thought I ought not to deny him that pleasure."

"Monsieur is welcome to the country," said the bandit, bowing, and taking a few steps toward us.

I returned his salute with most punctilious courtesy.

"Have you been here some time?" queried Orlandi.

"Yes; twenty minutes."

"Ah, I see. I heard Diamante's voice howling at the *mucchio*, and he joined me quarter of an hour ago. He's a good, faithful beast, isn't he, Monsieur Lucien?"

"Yes, that he is, Orlandi; good and faithful," replied Lucien, patting Diamante's head.

"If you knew M. Lucien was here, why did n't you come sooner," I interposed.

"Because we had an appointment at nine o'clock; and it's as much out of the way to arrive a quarter of an hour too soon as a quarter of an hour too late."

"Do you mean that as a reproach to me, Orlandi," Lucien asked, with a laugh.

"No, monsieur; you may have good reasons for doing as you did. Then, too, you have a companion, and it was probably on Monsieur's account that you changed your usual custom; for you are very exact yourself,

Monsieur Lucien, and nobody knows it better than I. You have put yourself out often enough for me, God knows!"

"It's not worth while to say anything about that, Orlandi, for this will probably be the last time."

"Have n't we a few words to say to each other on that subject, Monsieur Lucien?"

"Yes; and if you will follow me —"

"At your service."

Lucien turned to me.

"You will excuse me, won't you?" he said.

"Of course! Go ahead."

They walked away together; and going to the breach in the wall through which Orlandi had come in, they stood there, in bold relief against the moonlight, which seemed to trace the outlines of their dark forms with liquid silver.

Then I was able to look carefully at Orlandi for the first time.

He was a tall man, wearing an untrimmed beard, and dressed exactly like young De Franchi, except that his clothes bore the marks of frequent contact with the rocks amid which their owner lived; of the thorns and briars through which he had many times been forced to flee, and of the earth on which he made his bed every night.

I could not hear what they said, — in the first place, because they were twenty paces away; and secondly, because they spoke the Corsican dialect. But I could easily see by their gestures that the bandit was hotly refusing to be convinced by a line of reasoning which the young man was laying down, with a calmness which did credit to his impartiality.

At last Orlandi's gestures became less frequent and

more forcible. His words seemed to come less freely. Finally, at some observation made by Lucien, he hung his head, and the next moment grasped the young man's hand.

The conference was evidently at an end, for they both came back toward me.

"My dear guest," said Lucien, "Orlandi, here, desires to press your hand and thank you."

"For what, pray?" I asked.

"Why, for consenting to be one of his sponsors. I have promised for you."

"If you have promised for me, of course I accept, even without knowing what you're talking about."

I held out my hand to the bandit, who did me the honor of touching it with the ends of his fingers.

"By this means," continued Lucien, "you will be able to say to my brother that everything is arranged as he wished, and that you signed the contract."

"Is there to be a marriage, then?"

"No, not yet; but perhaps that will come."

A scornful smile flickered on the bandit's lips.

"Peace," said he, "since you wish it so, Monsieur Lucien, but no alliance. That is n't in the treaty."

"No," said Lucien, "it is only written, in all probability, in the future. But let's talk of something else. Did you hear nothing while I was talking with Orlandi?"

"Of what you were saying, do you mean?"

"No; but of what a pheasant was saying in the vicinity."

"Indeed, I did think that I heard one somewhere; but I supposed I was wrong."

"No, you were n't. There is a cock in the big chestnut-tree that you know of, Monsieur Lucien, not

a hundred steps from here. I heard him just now, as I passed."

"All right," said Lucien, gayly. "We must eat him to-morrow."

"He would be a dead pheasant before this," said Orlandi, "if I had n't been afraid that they would think down in the village I was firing at something besides a pheasant."

"I spoke about that," said Lucien. "By the way," he added, turning to me, and throwing back over his shoulder his gun which he had just loaded, "the post of honor to you."

"One moment! I am not so sure of my aim as you, and I don't want to lose my share in the consumption of the pheasant; so you shoot him."

"Very well. You are n't used to shooting at night, as we are, and you would certainly fire too low; besides, you can take your revenge by daylight to-morrow, if you have nothing better to do."

CHAPTER IX.

WE passed out of the ruins on the opposite side to where we entered, Lucien leading the way.

Just as we set foot in the path, the pheasant began to call anew, thus betraying himself.

He was about eighty paces from us, hidden among the branches of a chestnut, the approach to which was made difficult on all sides by dense underbrush.

"How will you get at him without his hearing you?" I asked Lucien. "It seems pretty hard to me."

"Oh, no," he replied. "If I could only see him, I would fire from here."

"From here? Have you a gun that will kill a pheasant at eighty paces?"

"With shot, no; but with a bullet."

"Ah, with a bullet! That's a different matter; and you did well to take the shot yourself."

"Would you like to see him?" inquired Orlandi.

"Yes," said Lucien, "I confess that it would give me great pleasure."

"Wait a moment, then;" and Orlandi began to imitate the call of the hen-pheasant.

On the instant, although we could not see the bird, we saw a movement among the leaves of the chestnut, as he mounted from one branch to another, replying all the time to Orlandi's advances.

At last he appeared at the top of the tree, in plain sight, and sharply defined against the dead white of the sky.

Orlandi ceased to call and the pheasant to move. Lucien at once unalung his gun, and taking a rapid aim, fired.

The pheasant fell like a ball of lead.

"Go find him!" said Lucien to Diamante.

The dog plunged into the underbrush, and came back in five minutes with the pheasant in his jaws. The bullet had passed clean through his body.

"A fine shot, indeed!" I exclaimed; "and I congratulate you on it, especially since you made it with a double-barrelled gun."

"Oh, there's less credit due me for that than you imagine. One of the barrels is rifled, and carries a bullet as well as a rifle."

"Never mind! Even with a rifle, the shot deserves honorable mention."

"Pshaw!" said Orlandi; "with a rifle, Monsieur Lucien can hit a five-franc piece at three hundred paces."

"Can you fire a pistol, too, as well as you can a gun?"

"Well, almost," said Lucien. "At twenty-five paces I can cut six balls out of twelve on the edge of a knife."

I took off my hat and saluted him.

"How about your brother?" I asked. "Is he as expert as you?"

"My brother?" he repeated. "Poor Louis! he never touched rifle or pistol. So I am always in mortal terror that he will get into some wretched affair at Paris; for he's as brave as a lion, and would let himself be killed to uphold the honor of the island."

As he spoke, Lucien stuffed the pheasant into his capacious pocket.

Now," said he, "farewell until to-morrow, my dear Orlandi."

"Until to-morrow, Monsieur Lucien."

"I know how punctual you are. At ten o'clock, you and your people and friends will be at the end of the street, won't you? At the same hour, Colona will be at the other end of the street, toward the mountain, with his family and friends. We will be on the steps of the church."

"It's agreed, Monsieur Lucien; thanks for your trouble. And I thank you for the honor you do me, monsieur," he continued, turning to me with a bow.

With this exchange of compliments, we separated, Orlandi plunging into the woods again, while we started back toward the village.

Diamante stood a moment, hesitating between Orlandi and ourselves, looking first to one side and then to the other. After five minutes of indecision, he did us the honor of preferring to follow us.

I confess that when I was scaling the two walls of rock of which I have spoken, I was not altogether free from anxiety as to how I should manage about getting down, — the descent, as is well known, being generally much more difficult than the ascent.

I was very glad to see that Lucien, as if divining my thoughts, took a different road from that by which we had come. There was the additional advantage about this road, that it enabled us to indulge in conversation, which steep acclivities naturally interfere with.

Now, as the slope was gradual and the road easy, I had not taken fifty steps before I began my everlasting questions.

"So peace is made," I said.

"Yes; but not without some trouble, as you saw. At last I made him understand that all the advances were made by the Colona. In the first place, they have had five men killed, and the Orlandi only four. The Colona agreed to the reconciliation yesterday, while the Orlandi withheld their consent until to-day. Finally, the Colona agree to restore a live hen to the Orlandi, publicly, — a concession which amounts to an admission that they are in the wrong. This last consideration decided him."

"And this touching reconciliation is to take place to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, at ten o'clock. You see that you're not so unlucky, after all. You hoped to see a vendetta!"

"Oh, a fine thing a vendetta is!" the young man resumed, with a laugh full of bitterness. "For four hundred years, in Corsica, people have talked of nothing else. And you are to see a reconciliation. Ah, that's a much greater curiosity than a vendetta."

I began to laugh.

"You see," he said, "that you laugh at us, and you're quite right. Indeed, we are a laughable people."

"No," said I, "I was laughing at a very curious thing, — to see how furious you are with yourself for having succeeded so well."

"Isn't it strange? Ah, if you could have understood me, you would have admired my eloquence. But come back ten years hence, and everybody will speak French, never fear."

"You are an excellent advocate."

"No, let there be no mistake; I am umpire. What the devil would you have! An umpire's duty is to conciliate. If I were appointed umpire between Almighty

God and Satan, I would try to bring them together; although I should have an abiding conviction that God would be very foolish to listen to me."

As I saw that this subject tended to embitter my companion, I let the conversation drop; and as he made no attempt to renew it, we arrived at the house without another word.

CHAPTER X.

GRIFFO was waiting for us.

Before his master said a word to him, he put his hand in Lucien's coat-pocket and pulled out the pheasant. He had heard the report, and recognized the weapon which produced it.

Madame de Franchi had not retired; but she had gone to her room, instructing Griffo to ask her son to come to her before he went to bed.

The young man inquired if there was anything I was in need of, and upon my replying in the negative, asked my permission to fulfil his mother's request.

I made a suitable reply, and went up to my room. I had a feeling of pride as I entered. My analogical reasoning was borne out by the facts, and I congratulated myself upon having divined Louis's character and Lucien's with equal accuracy.

I undressed myself at my leisure, and got into bed, well satisfied with myself, and provided with Victor Hugo's "Orientales," which I found in the library of the advocate that was to be.

I was reading "Le Feu du Ciel" for the hundredth time, when I heard steps on the stairs. They stopped at my door, and I fancied that my host had come to bid me good-night, but hesitated to open the door lest I might be asleep.

"Come in," I said, laying my book on the table by the bed.

Thereupon the door opened, and Lucien appeared.

"Excuse me," he said, "but it seemed to me, on reflection, that I had been so boorish this evening that I ought not to go to bed without apologizing to you; so I have come to beg you to forgive me, and to put myself entirely at your disposal, as you seem still to have a good many questions to ask me."

"A thousand thanks," I said; "but, through your courtesy, I know almost everything that I was curious to know. There is only one thing left, and that I had made up my mind not to ask you about."

"Why so?"

"Because it would be altogether too inquisitive. But I warn you not to urge me, or I won't answer for myself."

"Oh, go ahead and ask it. Unsatisfied curiosity is a wretched thing. It naturally arouses suspicion; and out of every three suspicions, there are always two which are less fair to the object of them than the truth would be."

"You may be reassured as to that; for the worst suspicions I have conceived of you lead me to believe that you are a magician."

The young man began to laugh.

"The devil!" said he. "You will make me as curious as you are yourself. Tell me what you mean, pray."

"Well, you see, you were good enough to make everything clear to me, except a single point. You showed me those interesting weapons, which, by the way, I shall ask your permission to see again before I take my leave."

"One."

"You explained to me the meaning of the double inscription on the butts of the two rifles."

"Two."

"You described to me how, owing to the extraordinary circumstances attending your birth, you feel the same sensations that affect your brother, though you are three thousand miles apart, just as he, doubtless, feels all yours."

"Three."

"But when Madame de Franchi, referring to your recent despondency, which made you fear that some calamity had happened to your brother, asked you if you were sure that he was not dead, you replied, 'No; if he were, I should have seen him.'"

"Yes, it's true; I did say that."

"Well, if a profane ear may be permitted to hear the explanation of those words, I beg you to explain them to me."

The young man's face had assumed so grave an expression as I was speaking that I uttered the last words with some hesitancy.

There was a moment's silence after I ceased to speak.

"Ah, I see that I have been inconsiderate," said I. "Forget that I said it."

"No," he replied; "but you are a man of the world, and consequently of a sceptical turn of mind. For that reason I fear to see you treat as mere superstition an old family tradition which has been current four hundred years."

"Listen," said I. "I give you my word of honor that no one on earth is so credulous as I am in the matter of legends and traditions; and there are some things in which my belief is particularly strong,—I mean things which seem utterly impossible."

"You believe in ghosts, then?"

"Would you like me to tell you a little personal experience of mine?"

"Yes; that will encourage me."

"My father died in 1807, when I was but three and a half years old. As the doctors had said he must die soon, I was taken to the house of an old cousin.

"The house stood between a courtyard and a garden. She had a bed prepared for me opposite her own, and put me to bed at my regular hour. I was not old enough to realize the extent of the misfortune which threatened me, and I went quietly to sleep. Suddenly I heard three violent blows on the door of our room. I awoke, jumped out of bed, and ran to the door.

"'Where are you going?' my cousin asked.

"She had been awakened, as I had, by the three blows, and was terribly frightened; for she knew that, the street-door being closed, it was impossible for any human being to be knocking on that door.

"'I am going to open the door for papa; he has come to say good-by to me,' I replied.

"It was her turn then to jump up. And she put me to bed again, do what I would; for I was weeping bitterly, and shrieking,—

"'Papa is at the door. I want to see papa before he goes away for always.'"

"Has the same thing ever happened again, since?" Lucien asked.

"No; although I have often appealed to my father to come. But it may be that God accords to the innocent child what he denies to the corrupt adult."

"We, in our family, are more fortunate than you," said Lucien, smiling.

"Do your dead relations visit you?"

"Whenever any great event is about to happen, or has happened."

"To what do you attribute this privilege of your family?"

"This is the story, as tradition has it. I told you that Savilia left two sons."

"Yes, I remember."

"They grew to manhood, loving one another with all the love they would have had for their parents, if they had lived. They swore a solemn oath that nothing should part them, not even death. And when they were about to enter into some conspiracy or other, they wrote, in their blood, upon pieces of parchment which they exchanged, the mutual oath that the one who died first would appear to the other at the moment of his own death, in the first place, and thereafter in all the supreme crises of his life. Three months after, one of them was killed in an ambuscade, just as the other was in the act of sealing a letter he was about to send him. As he pressed his ring upon the melted wax, he heard a sigh behind him; and turning around, saw his brother standing there, with his hand on his shoulder. But he could n't feel the hand, mark you. He involuntarily handed him the letter he had been writing. The other took it, and disappeared. The night before his own death, he saw him again. The brothers evidently did not enter into this engagement for themselves alone, but for their descendants as well; for, ever since that time, these apparitions have been kept up, on the eve of every important event, as well as at the moment of the death of any member of the family."

"Have you ever seen one of them?"

"No; but as my father, during the night which preceded his death, was informed by his father's spirit that he was about to die, I presume that my brother and I shall enjoy the same privilege, having done nothing to deprive ourselves of it."

"And is this privilege accorded only to the males of the family?"

"Yes."

"That is strange."

"It is so, nevertheless."

I looked earnestly at this youth, who told me so coolly, and with such a calm and serious mien, a thing which would be universally regarded as impossible; and I mentally echoed Hamlet's words:—

"There are more things in Heav'n and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

At Paris I should have taken him for a mystic; but here, in the heart of Corsica, in a little out-of-the-way village, there was no avoiding the alternative of looking upon him either as a madman who really deceived himself, or as a being who was more privileged — or more unfortunate — than other men.

"Now," said he, after a long silence, "do you know what you wanted to know?"

"Yes, thank you. I am deeply touched by your confidence in me, and I promise to keep your secret."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said he, smiling again, "there's no secret about it; and the first peasant you happened to meet in the village would tell you the story just as I do. I only hope that my brother won't have boasted of this privilege in Paris, where the result would probably be to make men laugh in his face, and give women the hysterics."

With that he rose and went to his own room, after bidding me good-night.

Although very tired, I had some difficulty in going to sleep; and my sleep, when it did come, was much troubled.

In my dreams I saw all the persons I had come in contact with during the day, but all mixed up together in a meaningless jumble. Not till daybreak did I succeed in getting any real sleep; and I slept till I was awakened by the sound of a clock, apparently striking in my ears.

I pulled the bell-cord; for my Sybaritic predecessor had carried luxury so far as to have that article within reach of his hand, — doubtless it was the only one in the village.

Griffo at once made his appearance, with hot water. I saw that M. Louis de Franchi had trained his *valet-de-chambre* in the way he should go.

Lucien had already inquired twice if I were awake, and had announced his intention of coming in to wake me, if I gave no sign of life by half-past nine. It was then twenty-five minutes past; so he soon appeared.

This time he was dressed like a Frenchman, — and a fashionable Frenchman, at that. He wore a black frock-coat, a fancy waistcoat, and white trowsers; for white trowsers are worn in Corsica long before March.

He noticed my look of surprise.

"You are admiring my costume," said he. "It's one more proof that I am getting civilized."

"Yes, upon my word," I replied; "and, I confess, I am considerably surprised to find there is so good a tailor at Ajaccio. Why, with my velvet costume, I look like a common Jean de Paris beside you."

"Ah, but my outfit is from Humann, from beginning to end, my dear guest. You see, my brother and I are built exactly alike; so he thought it would be a good joke to send me a complete wardrobe, which I only wear on great occasions, as you can imagine, — when M. le Préfet passes through, for instance; when

M. le Général, commanding the eighty-sixth department, makes his circuit; or when I receive a guest like yourself, and that privilege is coincident with so solemn a function as that which is to take place to-day."

There was in his speech an incessant strain of irony, guided by a superior intellect, which, although it might put his interlocutor ill at ease, never overstepped the limits of perfect propriety.

I contented myself, therefore, with bowing my acknowledgments, while he drew on, with the care which told of long habit, a pair of gloves, moulded to his hand by Bouvin or Rousseau.

In his then garb, he looked the fashionable Parisian to the life.

Meanwhile I was finishing my own toilet.

Quarter to ten struck.

"Come," said Lucien, "if you want to see the show, it's time for us to take our places; unless you prefer to take your breakfast first, which would be more reasonable, perhaps."

"Thanks; I rarely eat before eleven or twelve o'clock, so I can attend to both."

"Come on, then."

I took my hat, and followed him.

CHAPTER XI.

STANDING at the top of the flight of eight steps which led up to the front door of the stronghold inhabited by Madame de Franchi and her son, we overlooked the village square, which was now as crowded as it had been deserted the night before; but the crowd was composed entirely of women and young children, — not a man was to be seen in the square itself.

On the topmost church step stood a man of solemn aspect, wearing a tricolored sash; it was the mayor.

Under the porch, another man, dressed in black, was sitting at a table, with a paper covered with writing under his hand. This was the notary, and the paper was the act of reconciliation.

I took my place on one side of the table with Orlandi's sponsors; on the other side were those who acted in that capacity for Colona. Lucien, who acted for both alike, stood behind the notary. In the background, in the choir of the church, the priests could be seen, all ready to say Mass.

The clock struck ten.

Immediately there was a movement in the crowd, and all eyes were turned toward one or the other end of the street, if that name can fairly be bestowed upon the irregular space between a lot of houses, built according to the caprice or whim of their owners.

Soon Orlandi appeared at the end nearest the mountain, and Colona at the other. Each was followed by his adherents; but, in accordance with the programme laid

down, not one of them was armed. Except for their somewhat stern features, they might easily have been mistaken for worthy church wardens marching in procession.

The leaders of the two factions were in striking contrast to each other, physically.

Orlandi, as I have said, was tall and thin, swarthy, quick of movement.

Colona was short, thickset, and powerful; he had red hair and whiskers, and both were short and curly.

Each carried in his hand an olive branch, the symbolical emblem of the peace they were about to enter into, poetically devised by the mayor.

In addition to the olive branch, Colona held by the legs a white hen, intended to replace, in lieu of damages and interest, the bird which had occasioned the quarrel ten years before.

The hen was alive.

This point was discussed for a long while, and came very near causing the whole affair to fall through, Colona considering it a twofold humiliation to return, living, the fowl his aunt had thrown, dead, into Orlandi's cousin's face.

However, Lucien's logic at last prevailed upon Colona to restore the hen, as it had prevailed upon Orlandi to receive it.

The moment the two adversaries appeared, the bells, which had but just ceased to strike, went at it again in good earnest.

As they came in sight of one another, Orlandi and Colona made almost the same movement, clearly indicating their mutual repulsion; however, they kept on.

Just in front of the church door they halted, some ten feet apart.

If these two men had come within a hundred paces of each other ten days before, one of them would certainly have remained on the spot.

For five minutes or more, there was perfect silence, not only in the two groups, but in the whole assemblage, — a silence, however, which had nothing pacific in it.

Then M. le Maire began to speak.

“Well, Colona,” said he, “don’t you know that it’s for you to speak first?”

Colona made a mighty effort to repress his feelings, and muttered a few words in the Corsican dialect.

I thought I could make out that he expressed his regret for having been for ten years at feud with his good neighbor Orlandi, and that he offered him by way of reparation the white hen which he held in his hand.

Orlandi waited until his adversary’s sentence was quite completed, and then replied with some other Corsican words, whereby he promised to remember nothing anterior to the formal reconciliation which had been brought about under the auspices of the mayor, by the arbitration of M. Lucien, and which M. le Notaire had reduced to writing.

Thereupon both relapsed into silence.

“Well, messieurs,” said the mayor, “my impression is that it was agreed that you should shake hands.”

The two deadly enemies instinctively put their hands behind their backs.

The mayor left the steps, went to Colona and pulled his hand from behind his back, did the same to Orlandi, and after some considerable effort, which he tried to conceal from the refractory bandits by an idiotic smile, he succeeded in bringing their hands together.

The notary seized the opportunity to rise to his feet,

and read as follows, while the mayor held together the two hands, which struggled at first to get away, but at last resigned themselves to remain clasped: —

Before us, Giuseppe Antonio Sarrola, notary of Sullacaro, province of Sartène,

On the village square in front of the church, in the presence of M. le Maire, the respective sponsors, and all the inhabitants of the village,

Between Gaetano Orso Orlandi, called Orlandini,

And Marco Vincenzo Colona, called Schioppone,

The following agreement is hereby solemnly entered into: —

From this day, 4th March, 1841, the vendetta declared ten years since shall cease.

From the same day, they will live together like good neighbors and friends, as their families used to live prior to the unhappy affair which has brought discord between their relations and friends.

In witness whereof they have signed these presents beneath the porch of the village church, with M. Polo Arbori, mayor of the Commune, M. Lucien de Franchi, umpire, the sponsors of each of the contracting parties, and us, the notary aforesaid.

Sullacaro, this 4th March, 1841.

I noticed, with much respect for the notary's tact and discretion, that he entirely omitted any reference to the fowl which put Colona in such a humiliating position with regard to Orlandi. This omission caused Colona's features to lighten up, while Orlandi's were clouded in the same degree. The latter looked at the chicken which he held in his hand very much as if he were strongly tempted to throw it in Colona's face; but a warning glance from Lucien de Franchi nipped that evil intention in the bud, if indeed he had it.

The mayor saw that there was no time to lose; he went up the steps backwards, still holding the two hands

together, and without taking his eyes off the newly reconciled for an instant.

Then, in order to avert any further discussion, which was certain to arise when they came to sign, as each of the two evidently considered that it would be a concession on his part to sign first, he took the pen and wrote his own name, and having thus converted the shame into an honor, passed it to Orlandi, who took it from his hands, signed the treaty, and passed it on to Lucien; he resorted to a like pacific subterfuge, and handed it to Colona, who made his mark.

At the same moment the sacred music pealed forth from the church, much as the *Te Deum* is sung after a victory.

We all signed after that, without distinction of rank or title, as the French nobility signed the protest against the Duc du Maine's exaltation, one hundred and twenty years before.

Then the two heroes of the day entered the church, and knelt, one on either side of the choir, as had been arranged beforehand.

I saw that after that Lucien's mind was perfectly easy; the reconciliation was complete, for it had been sworn to before God, as well as in the sight of men.

The rest of the divine service passed off without any incident worthy of note. When the Mass was at an end, Orlandi and Colona left the church with the same formality.

At the door they once more touched each other's hand at the mayor's request; then each of them, accompanied by his train of kinsmen and friends, repaired to his own house, which neither of them had entered for three years.

Lucien and I returned to the De Franchi abode, where

dinner awaited us. It was easy for me to see, by the extraordinary attentions lavished upon me, that Lucien had read my name over my shoulder when I wrote it at the foot of the treaty, and that it was a name not entirely unknown to him.

In the morning I had declared to him my purpose to take my leave immediately after dinner. My presence at Paris was absolutely necessary on account of the rehearsals of "*Un Mariage sous Louis XV.*;" and notwithstanding the urgent requests of both mother and son, I persisted in my first intention.

Lucien then asked my permission to avail himself of my offer, by writing to his brother; and Madame de Franchi, who had a mother's loving heart for all her old-fashioned force of character, made me promise to hand the letter to her son with my own hand.

The commission would not put me out to any extent; for Louis de Franchi, like the true Parisian he was, lived on Rue du Helder, No. 7.

I asked to see Lucien's room once more, and he went up with me.

"You know," said he, with a sweep of his hand which included the entire contents of the room, "that if anything here takes your fancy, it is yours."

I took down a little dagger which hung in a corner, sufficiently out of the way to denote that it had no especial value; and as Lucien had looked longingly at my hunting-belt, and praised its arrangement, I begged him to accept it. He had the good taste to take it without making me force it on him.

At this moment Griffio appeared, to say that my horse was saddled and the guide was waiting for me.

I had put aside the gift I purposed bestowing upon Griffio; it was a sort of hunting-knife, with two pistols

arranged along the blade, the hammers being hidden in the hilt.

I have never seen such delight as his.

I went down, and found Madame de Franchi at the foot of the stairs; she was waiting to wish me *bon voyage* on the same spot where she had bade me welcome. I kissed her hand; I felt an immense respect for this woman, whose manners were so simple and at the same time so dignified.

Lucien escorted me to the door.

"Any other day," said he, "I would have my horse saddled, and ride with you to the other side of the mountain; but to-day I don't dare leave Sullacaro, for fear one or the other of our new-made friends will make a fool of himself."

"You are quite right," said I; "pray, believe that I congratulate myself on having had the good luck to witness a scene so novel in Corsica as that at which I was present this morning."

"Yes, yes," said he, "you may well congratulate yourself; for you have seen something which might well make our ancestors turn in their graves."

"I understand; in their day, a man's word was so sacred that they would n't have needed the intervention of a notary to put their reconciliation in writing."

"They never would have been reconciled at all."

He gave me his hand.

"Don't you wish me to embrace your brother for you?" I asked.

"Most certainly, yes, if it won't be too much trouble."

"Well, let us embrace then; I can only give him what I have received.

"Shall I not see you again some day?" I asked, when we had done as I suggested.

"Yes, if you return to Corsica."

"But suppose you come to Paris?"

"I shall never go there," was Lucien's reply.

"At all events, you will find my card on the mantel in your brother's room. Don't forget the address."

"I promise you that if anything whatever should take me to the Continent, my first visit shall be to you."

"Good; it's agreed then."

He gave me his hand once more and for the last time, and we parted; but he followed me with his eyes as long as I was in sight, going down the street which led to the river.

Everything was very calm in the village, although that sort of indefinable, subdued excitement which follows great events was noticeable. I rode along, gazing at every door I passed, with the constant expectation of seeing my godson Orlandi issue from it; for in truth he owed me a word of thanks, and had not given it to me. But I passed the last house and got out into the country without seeing anything which resembled him.

I supposed I was entirely forgotten; and, indeed, considering the serious subjects for thought which such an occasion must have furnished Orlandi, I was quite ready to forgive his oversight, when, as I was approaching the wood of Bicchisano, a man suddenly came out of a thicket and stood in the middle of the road. I at once recognized that same Orlandi, whom, with a Frenchman's impatience, and being accustomed to Parisian manners, I had been accusing of ingratitude.

I noticed that he had had time to don the same costume which he wore when I saw him among the ruins of Vicentello, — that is to say, he wore his cartridge-belt, in which the inevitable pistol was thrust, and he had his gun.

When I was within fifty feet of him, he took off his hat, while I put spurs to my horse so as not to keep him waiting.

"Monsieur," he said, "I could n't let you leave Sullacaro without thanking you for the honor you deigned to do me, by serving as one of my witnesses; and as my heart was not at ease, nor my tongue free in the village, I came here to wait for you."

"I thank you," I replied; "but you need n't have gone out of your way for that: the honor was all mine."

"And then, monsieur, think a moment," he went on; "one does n't lay aside the habits of four years in an instant. The mountain air is a terrible thing; for when you have once lived in it, you stifle anywhere else. In these wretched houses I think every minute that the roof will come crashing about my head."

"But you are going to resume your former mode of life, nevertheless," I rejoined. "You have a house, haven't you? and a little farm, and a vineyard?"

"Yes, I have; but my sister kept the house, and the Lucquois used to till my land, and harvest the grapes. We Corsicans don't work."

"What do you do, pray?"

"We overlook the laborers, go about with guns on our shoulders, and hunt."

"Well, dear Monsieur Orlandi," said I, holding out my hand, "good sport to you! But bear in mind that my honor, no less than yours, is pledged that henceforth you will fire only at stags and boars, pheasants and partridges, and never at Marco Vincenzio Colona, or any member of his family."

"Ah, Excellency," retorted my god-son, with an expression I had never before seen except on the face of

a Norman lawyer, "the hen he gave back to me was very thin!"

And without another word, he plunged into the thicket, and disappeared.

I continued my journey, deliberating upon this possible cause of renewed hostilities between the Orlandi and Colona.

That evening I slept at Albiteccia.

The next morning I reached Ajaccio, and was in Paris eight hours later.

CHAPTER XII.

THE very day of my arrival I called upon M. Louis de Franchi, but he was out.

I left my card, with a line to say that I had come straight from Sullacaro, and had a letter for him from his brother, M. Lucien. I asked at what hour he would receive me, adding that I had promised to deliver the letter to him in person.

The servant led me through the dining-room, and the salon, on the way to his master's cabinet, where I wrote this note.

I looked around with a curiosity easy to understand, and recognized the same tastes with which I had already been impressed at Sullacaro; but they were here indulged with true Parisian refinement. M. Louis de Franchi seemed to me to have delightful bachelor quarters.

The next day, when I was dressing,—at about eleven o'clock,—my servant announced M. de Franchi. I told him to show him into the salon, offer him the morning papers, and say to him that I would be with him in a moment.

Within five minutes I was in the salon.

At the noise I made in entering, M. de Franchi, who was reading, as an act of politeness probably, one of a series of articles of mine, which were then appearing in the "Presse," looked up.

I was absolutely paralyzed by his extraordinary resemblance to his brother.

He rose from his chair.

"Monsieur," said he, "I could hardly credit my good fortune yesterday, when I read the brief note my servant handed me when I returned. I made him describe your appearance twenty times, to make sure that it agreed with your portraits; at last, this morning, my twofold impatience to thank you, and to hear about my family, was too much for me, so I hurried to call upon you without thinking about the time. I am afraid I am very early."

"Pardon me," I replied, "if my first words are not in acknowledgment of your flattering compliment, but I confess, monsieur, that when I look at you, I ask myself whether it is to M. Louis or M. Lucien de Franchi that I have the honor of speaking."

"Yes, the resemblance is very striking, is it not?" he said with a smile; "and when I was at Sullacaro, my brother and myself were the only ones who were sure that we weren't mistaken. However, unless he has forsworn his Corsican habits since I left home, you must have seen him always in a costume which differentiates us to some extent."

"Indeed," said I, "it so happened that, when I last saw him, he was dressed exactly as you are, except that he wore white trousers, which are not yet the fashion in Paris; so that I have n't even the difference of costume you mention to distinguish between my remembrance of him and your actual presence. But," I continued, taking the letter from my wallet, "I realize that you must be in haste to learn about your family, so take this letter, which I would have left at your apartments yesterday, had I not promised Madame de Franchi to put it into your own hands."

"Did you leave them all well?"

"Yes, but anxious."

"About me?"

"About you. But read your letter, I beg."

"You will allow me?"

"Why, certainly!"

M. de Franchi broke the seal while I was rolling a cigarette.

I watched him closely while his eye ran quickly over his brother's letter; from time to time he would smile and mutter,—

"Dear Lucien! Dear, good mother! Yes—yes—I understand."

I had not recovered from the effects of the startling resemblance; yet, as Lucien had said, I saw that Louis's complexion was less ruddy, and that he spoke French more plainly.

"Well," said I, when he had finished, handing him a cigarette, which he lighted at mine, "you see that I was right in saying that your family were anxious, and I am overjoyed to find that there was no occasion for it."

"That's not altogether the fact," said he, sadly. "I have not been sick, to be sure; but I have had a very bitter grief, which was increased, I confess, by the thought that while I was suffering here, I was making my brother suffer at home."

"M. Lucien had already told me that, monsieur; but really, to enable me to believe that such an extraordinary thing was the truth, and not a mere hallucination of his, I needed nothing less than the proof I now have. And so you are convinced, monsieur, that the discomfort your brother experienced was caused by the unhappiness you were undergoing here?"

"Yes, monsieur, perfectly convinced."

"Then," I continued, "as your affirmative answer

has the effect of doubling my interest in what has befallen you, will you permit me to ask — from interest, not curiosity — if the grief of which you just told me is a thing of the past, and if you are now consoled ? ”

“ Oh, *mon Dieu* ! you know, monsieur, that the keenest sorrow is deadened by lapse of time ; and if nothing happens to inflame the wound at my heart, why, it will bleed some little time longer, and then it will heal, and leave only the scar. Meanwhile, receive my earnest thanks, and give me leave to come to see you occasionally, and talk about Sullacaro.”

“ With the very greatest pleasure,” I said ; “ but why should n’t we now prolong an interview which gives us equal pleasure ? Look, here comes my servant to say that breakfast is served. Do me the pleasure to eat a cutlet with me, and we can talk at our ease.”

“ It’s impossible, I am very sorry to say. I received a letter yesterday from the Keeper of the Seals, wherein he requests me to go to the Ministry of Justice at noon to-day ; and you understand, of course, that I, a poor little lawyer in embryo, can’t afford to keep such a great man waiting.”

“ Ah, is it likely to be with reference to the Orlandi-Colona affair that he has sent for you ? ”

“ I presume so ; and as my brother writes me that the feud is at an end — ”

“ It was adjusted before a notary. I can tell you all about it, for I signed the agreement as one of Orlandi’s sponsors.”

“ Indeed, my brother mentions the fact. It is within a few minutes of noon,” he said, consulting his watch ; “ I am going first to tell the Keeper of the Seals that my brother has fulfilled my promise.”

“ Oh, religiously ; my word for it.”

"Dear Lucien. I was sure he would do it, although it was against his principles."

"Yes, and you owe him a deal of gratitude; for it cost him dear, I assure you."

"We will speak of this again later, for you see it is very great happiness for me to see, with the eyes of my heart, my mother and brother, and my country, called up by you. So if you will kindly tell me your hours of leisure —"

"That is hard to do just now. For a few days after my return, I am necessarily somewhat of a vagabond. Tell me when and where I can find you."

"Listen," said he; "to-morrow is *Mi-Carême*, is n't it?"

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Are you going to the *bal de l'Opéra*?"

"Yes and no. Yes, if you ask the question with the intention of making an appointment with me; no, if I have nothing special to take me there."

"I must go, myself; I am compelled to go."

"Aha!" said I, smiling, "I see that it's true, as you said just now, that time deadens the sharpest pain, and that your wound will heal."

"You are wrong; for in all probability I am going to invite fresh suffering."

"Don't go, then."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*! do we do as we wish in this world? I am drawn there in spite of myself; I go where fate takes me. It would be much better that I should n't go, I know very well; and yet I shall go."

"Very well, then, until to-morrow at the *Opéra*."

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"Half-past twelve, if you will."

"And where?"

"In the lobby. At one, I have an appointment in front of the clock."

"All right."

We shook hands, and he hurried away. It was almost noon.

I passed the afternoon and the next day in the running around that a man has to do, who has been away eighteen months, and at half-past twelve at night I was at the rendezvous.

Louis kept me waiting some time; he had been following about the corridors a mask that he thought he recognized, but it had eluded him in the crowd, and he could n't find it again.

I undertook to talk about Corsica, but he was too *distracted* to pursue so serious a subject; his eyes were fixed upon the clock, and suddenly he left me crying,—

"Ah, there's my bunch of violets!"

He elbowed his way through the crowd toward a woman who had an enormous bouquet of violets in her hand.

As there were bouquets of all sorts in the foyer, luckily for the promenaders, I was soon accosted myself by a bouquet of camellias, who congratulated me upon my safe return to Paris.

The camellias were followed by a bouquet of roses, and then came a bouquet of heliotrope.

I was interviewing my fifth bouquet, in fact, when D—— came along.

"Ah, is it you, my dear fellow?" said he. "Welcome home, for you have come just in the nick of time. I am going to have a little supper this evening. So-and-so

will be there, and Such-a-one," naming three or four of our mutual friends, "and we count on you."

"A thousand thanks, dear boy," I replied; "but, notwithstanding my inclination to accept, I can't do it, for I am not alone."

"Why, it goes without saying that everybody will have the right to bring his companion; it is perfectly well understood that there will be six jars of water on the table, for no other purpose than to hold fresh bouquets."

"What! there's where you are wrong, my dear. I have no bouquets to put in your jars; I am with a male friend."

"Oh, indeed! but you know the proverb,— 'our friends' friends,' etc."

"He's a young man whom you don't know."

"Well, we will make one another's acquaintance then."

"I will suggest it to him."

"Do so, and if he declines, bring him by force."

"I will do my best, I promise you. At what time do you sit down?"

"At three o'clock; but as it will last till six, you have some margin."

"Very well."

At this point a bouquet of myosotis, which may have heard the last part of our conversation, took D——'s arm and walked away with him.

A few moments after, I met Louis, who had, as I judged, had it out with his bouquet of violets.

As my domino was not a particularly brilliant personage, I sent her away after one of my friends, and took Louis's arm.

"Well," I said, "did you find out what you wanted to know?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* yes; you know that at a *bal masqué* we never learn anything except what it would be better not to know."

"My poor friend," said I. "Forgive me for addressing you so; but I can't help feeling on intimate terms with you, knowing your brother as I do. Come, you are unhappy, are n't you? Tell me what the matter is."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* nothing worth the trouble of telling."

I saw that he chose to keep his secret, so I said nothing more.

We walked back and forth two or three times without speaking. I was rather listless, as I was expecting to meet nobody; but his eyes were wide open, and he anxiously scrutinized every domino that passed within sight.

"Look you," I said at last; "do you know what you ought to do?"

"I? No! What did you say — Excuse —"

"I was about to propose a little diversion, which you seem much in need of."

"What is it?"

"Come with me to supper with a friend of mine."

"Oh, no, indeed, I should be too gloomy a guest altogether."

"Nonsense! they'll all be silly enough to amuse you."

"Besides, I'm not invited."

"That's where you're wrong; you are invited."

"It's very polite of your host, but I don't consider myself worthy —"

At this moment we met D——, who seemed deeply engrossed with his bouquet of *myosotis*. He saw me, however, and hailed me.

"Well," said he, "we shall see you, shall we not? At three o'clock, remember."

"I'm sorry to say no, but I sha'n't be able to join you."

"Go to the devil, then!"

And he passed on.

"Who was that gentleman?" Louis inquired, evidently for the sake of saying something.

"Why, it's D——, a bachelor friend of mine, — a very clever fellow, although he is the manager of one of our leading newspapers."

"Monsieur D——!" cried Louis; "Monsieur D——! Do you know him?"

"To be sure; for two or three years past we have been intimately connected in business, and our personal relations are most friendly."

"Was it with him that you were going to sup to-night?"

"Yes."

"And it was his house that you suggested taking me to?"

"The same."

"That makes a difference, and I accept, — oh, I accept with the greatest pleasure."

"All right! I guess we can arrange it."

"Perhaps I ought not to go," added Louis, with a sad smile; "but you know what I said yesterday, — one does n't go where one ought, but where destiny drives one. For instance, it would have been much better for me not to come here this evening."

Just then we fell in with D—— again.

"I have changed my mind, my dear fellow," said I.

"You'll join us then?"

"Yes."

"Bravo! I must tell you one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"Every one who sups with us to-night must do the same thing day after to-morrow."

"By what law?"

"On account of a bet Château-Renaud has made."

I felt Louis start convulsively, his arm being in mine.

I turned and looked at him; but although he was paler than he was a moment before, his face was impassive.

"What is the bet?" I asked D——.

"Oh, it's too long a story to tell here. Besides, there's a certain person concerned in it, who might cause him to lose, if she heard of it."

"All right then. At three o'clock."

"At three."

We parted again; as we passed the clock I glanced at it, and saw that it was twenty-five minutes to three.

"Do you know this M. de Château-Renaud?" Louis asked me, vainly struggling to conceal the emotion he felt.

"By sight only; I have met him occasionally in society."

"He's not a friend of yours, then?"

"Not even an acquaintance."

"Ah, all the better!" said Louis.

"Why so?"

"Oh, for no special reason."

"But do you know him yourself?"

"Indirectly."

Notwithstanding this evasive reply, it required no great discernment to see that there was between M. de Franchi and M. de Château-Renaud one of those mysterious relations in which a woman is always the principal figure. I had an instinctive feeling that it would be much better for my companion that we should both go quietly home.

"Will you take my advice, Monsieur de Franchi?" I said.

"In what? Tell me."

"Don't go to this supper at D——'s."

"Why not, pray? Does n't he expect us,—or rather, did n't you tell him that you would bring a companion?"

"Yes; it's not that."

"What then?"

"Well, I simply think that we'd better not go."

"But you must have some reason for this change; just now you were insisting on dragging me there, almost against my will."

"We shall be sure to meet M. de Château-Renaud."

"So much the better! He's said to be a very pleasant fellow, and I shall be delighted to become better acquainted with him."

"Very well, if you will have it so," I rejoined.
"Let's be off."

We went down to get our top-coats.

D—— lived only a few steps from the Opera. It was a fine night, and I thought the fresh air might calm my companion a little; so I proposed that we should walk, and he assented.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE found in the drawing-room several of my friends, habitués of the green-room and the foyer, — De B——, L——, V——, and A——. In addition there were, as I rather anticipated, several unmasked dominos, who were holding their bouquets in their hands, waiting for the moment to put them in the *carafes*.

I presented Louis de Franchi to them all, and it is needless to say that his reception was uniformly gracious.

Ten minutes after, D—— came in, escorting the bouquet of myosotis, who unmasked with a degree of ease and confidence which bespoke a pretty woman, and one, moreover, who was well used to functions of this sort.

I introduced M. de Franchi to D——.

"Now," said De B——, "if the introductions are all over, I propose that we adjourn to the table."

"The introductions are all made, but the guests are n't all here yet," said D——.

"Who's missing?"

"Château-Renaud."

"Ah, to be sure. Is n't there a bet?" V—— inquired.

"Yes, a bet of a supper for twelve persons, that he will bring a certain lady whom he has undertaken to bring."

"Who is she, pray?" asked the bouquet of myosotis; "Who is this lady who is so shy and retiring that bets of that sort are made about her?"

I looked at De Franchi; he was calm outwardly, but pale as death.

"Faith!" D—— replied, "I don't think there's any reason why I should n't give you her name, especially as you probably don't know her. It is Madame —"

Louis laid his hand on D——'s arm.

"Monsieur," said he, "may I, as your newest acquaintance, ask you to do me a favor?"

"What is it, monsieur?"

"Do not name the person whom you expect with M. de Château-Renaud; you know that she's a married woman."

"Very true; but her husband is in Smyrna, or the Indies, or Mexico,—or I don't know where. When a woman's husband is so far away, it's the same as if she had none."

"Her husband will return in a few days. I know him well; he's a fine fellow, and I should like, if possible, to spare him the pain of learning, on his return, that his wife had been guilty of such a piece of heedless folly."

"Pray, pardon me, monsieur," said D——; "I was unaware that you knew her. I was n't even sure that she was married. But since you do know her, and her husband too —"

"I do know them both."

"We will be a little more careful. Messieurs and mesdames, whether Château-Renaud comes or stays away, whether he is alone or has a companion, whether he loses or wins his bet, I beg you will keep your counsel as to the whole affair."

Secrecy was promised unanimously, — not probably from any very deep regard for propriety, but because they were very hungry, and consequently in a great hurry to fall to.

"Thanks, monsieur;" said De Franchi, giving his hand to D——, "you have acted like an honorable and gallant gentleman."

We passed into the dining-room, and took our places; there were two vacant seats, intended for Château-Renaud and the mysterious person he was expected to bring with him.

The servant started to remove the covers.

"No," said the host; "Château-Renaud has till four o'clock. When four o'clock strikes, you may serve the supper, for he will have lost."

I did not take my eyes from M. de Franchi; I saw him look at the clock, which marked twenty minutes to four.

"Is the clock right?" he asked coldly.

"I have nothing to do with that," laughed D——; "that's Château-Renaud's affair. I set the clock by his watch, so that he couldn't complain that it was too fast."

"Well, messieurs," said the bouquet of myosotis, "for heaven's sake, if we can't talk about Château-Renaud and his unknown, let's let them alone; the next thing we know we shall be dropping into allegory or enigmas, and they're enough to bore one to death."

"You're quite right," said V——. "Is there — There are so many women we can talk about, and who ask nothing better than to be talked about."

"Here's to their health," said D——.

They began to fill the glasses with champagne *frappé*. Each guest had a bottle by his side, but I noticed that Louis barely moistened his lips.

"Go on and drink," said I; "he is n't coming, you see."

"It's only quarter to four," he replied. "At four

o'clock, for all I am so far behind, I promise you that I'll overtake the one who has the longest lead."

"Very well."

While we were exchanging these words in an undertone, the conversation became general and noisy; at intervals D—— and Louis glanced at the clock, which kept up its methodical, unimpassioned march, notwithstanding the impatience of the two who had their eyes fixed on its hands.

At five minutes to four I caught Louis's eye.

"Your health!" I said.

He took his glass and put it to his lips with a smile. He had drunk barely half of it, when the bell rang.

I did not suppose he could be any paler, but I was wrong.

"There he is," he said.

"Yes, but perhaps she is n't with him," I replied.

"We shall find out in an instant."

The ringing of the bell had attracted everybody's attention, and perfect silence succeeded the uproarious conversation which had been going on about the table.

Thereupon something like a discussion was heard in the reception-room, and D—— at once rose, and went to the door.

"I heard her voice," said Louis, seizing my wrist, and pressing it tight.

"Come, come, courage; be a man," I replied. "It's perfectly clear that if she comes to take supper at the house of a man whom she does n't know, and with other guests whom she knows as little, she's an abandoned woman, and such a one does not deserve an honest man's love."

"But, madame, I entreat you, come in," we heard D—— say in the reception-room; "I assure you that we're all friends here."

"Pray, come in, dear Émilie," said M. de Château-Renaud; "you may keep your mask on, if you prefer."

"The villain!" muttered Louis.

As he spoke, a woman entered, dragged in, rather than escorted, by D——, who fancied he was performing his duty as host, and by Château-Renaud.

"Three minutes to four," said Château-Renaud to D——, in an undertone.

"Very good, my dear fellow; you have won."

"Not yet, monsieur," said the unknown, addressing Château-Renaud, and drawing herself up to her full height. "I understand your persistence now; you made a wager that you would bring me here to supper, did you not?"

Château-Renaud made no reply, and she turned to D——.

"Since this man doesn't answer, do you answer for him, monsieur," she said. "Is n't it true that M. de Château-Renaud bet that he would bring me to supper at your house?"

"I cannot deny, madame, that M. de Château-Renaud did authorize me to entertain that flattering hope."

"Well, he has lost; for I had no idea where he was taking me, but I thought I was going to sup with one of my friends of my own sex. Therefore, as I did n't come voluntarily, M. de Château-Renaud, it seems to me, ought to derive no benefit from my coming."

"But now that you're here, dear Émilie, you will remain, won't you? Look around you and see what good company you're in."

"Since I am here," said the unknown, "I will thank monsieur, who seems to be the host, for his courteous reception; but as I am, unfortunately, unable to accept

his kind invitation, I will beg M. Louis de Franchi to give me his arm, and take me home."

Louis gave one bound, and in the twinkling of an eye stood between M. de Château-Renaud and the unknown.

"I beg you to remember, madame," said the latter gentleman, through his clinched teeth, "that I brought you here, and consequently it is my place to take you home."

"Messieurs," said the unknown, "there are five men here, and I put myself in the safe-keeping of your honor; you will, I trust, prevent M. de Château-Renaud, from offering me any violence."

Château-Renaud made a quick movement, and we all rose.

"Very well, madame," said he, "you are free; I know whom I must look to."

"If you refer to me, monsieur," said Louis de Franchi, with an indescribable air of lofty pride, "you will find me at any time to-morrow at Rue du Helder, No. 7."

"Very well, monsieur. I may not have the honor of calling upon you myself, but I hope you will deign to receive two of my friends in my stead and place."

"It only needed this, monsieur," said Louis de Franchi, shrugging his shoulders. "It is like you to make an appointment of that sort before a lady. Come, madame," he continued, offering his arm to the unknown; "and believe that I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the honor you do me."

They left the house amid oppressive silence.

"Well, messieurs, how now!" said Château-Renaud, when the door closed behind them. "I have lost, that's all there is to it. We will all of us meet, to-morrow evening, at the Frères Provençaux."

He took his seat in one of the vacant chairs, and held out his glass to D——, who filled it to the brim.

However, despite Château-Renaud's forced hilarity, the balance of the supper was rather sombre, as may readily be imagined.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day, or rather the same day, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, I was at M. Louis de Franchi's door.

As I mounted the stairs, I met two young gentlemen going down. One was evidently a man of the world; the other, who wore the decoration of the Legion of Honor, seemed to be a military man, although dressed in citizen's clothes.

I suspected that they came from M. Louis de Franchi's apartments, and I watched them to the foot of the stairway. Then I went on, and rang.

The valet answered the bell, and said his master was in his study. When he entered to announce me, Louis, who was seated at a table, writing, turned his head.

"Ah," he exclaimed, twisting up the note he had commenced, and throwing it into the fire, "I was just writing to you, and was going to send you the note. Joseph, I am at home to no one."

The servant left the room.

"You met two gentlemen on the stairs, did you not?" Louis continued, pushing an easy-chair toward me.

"Yes; one of them was decorated."

"Those are the men."

"I suspected that they were coming from your rooms."

"You guessed rightly."

"Did they come on behalf of M. de Château-Renaud?"

"They are his seconds."

"Oh, the devil! He has apparently taken the thing in earnest."

"He could hardly do otherwise, you must agree," he replied.

"And they came —"

"To beg me to send two of my friends to discuss the affair with them. Then it was that I thought of you."

"I am much honored that you remembered me; but I can't call upon them alone."

"I have sent to ask a friend of mine, Baron Giordano Martelli, to come to breakfast with me. He will be here at eleven. We will breakfast together; and at noon you will be good enough, perhaps, to call upon these gentlemen, who have agreed to remain at home until three. Here are their names and addresses."

He handed me two cards, one of which bore the name of Baron René de Châteaugrand, the other M. Adrien de Boissy. The former lived at No. 12, Rue de la Paix. The second, who, as I suspected, belonged to the army, was a lieutenant in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, and lived at No. 29, Rue de Lille.

I turned the cards over and over in my hand.

"Well, what is it that embarrasses you?" Louis asked.

"I would like to have you tell me, frankly, if you regard this affair as serious. You understand that all our proceedings must depend upon that."

"Serious, indeed! Nothing could be more so! Besides, you must have heard that I placed myself at the disposal of M. de Château-Renaud, and he sent his seconds to me. There is nothing for me to do but let the affair take its course."

"Yes, that's so. But you see —"

"Well, go on," said Louis, with a smile.

"But you see, I must know why you are going to fight. One can't stand by and see two men cut one

another's throats without at least knowing the cause of the combat. You know that the responsibility of the second is really greater than the principal's."

"Well, then, I'll tell you, in a word, the origin of this quarrel. This is it:—

"When I reached Paris, a friend of mine, who was captain of a frigate, introduced me to his wife. She was young and beautiful. At our first meeting she made so deep an impression upon me that I very seldom took advantage of the permission which was given me to make myself at home in their house, fearing that I might fall in love with her.

"My friend complained of my indifference, whereupon I frankly told him the truth, — that is to say, I told him that his wife was too fascinating, in every respect, for me to take the risk of seeing her often. He smiled, gave me his hand, and insisted on my dining with them that very day.

"‘My dear Louis,’ he said to me, when the cloth was removed, ‘I shall start for Mexico in three weeks. I may be away three months, or, it may be, six months, or even longer. We sailors sometimes know the hour for sailing, but never when we shall return. I commend Émilie to you while I am away. Émilie, I beg you to look upon Louis de Franchi as your brother.’

"The young woman replied by giving me her hand. I was stupefied. I did n't know what to say, and I must have appeared a perfect idiot to my future sister.

"Three weeks later my friend sailed. During those three weeks he insisted upon my coming to dine with them *en famille* at least once a week.

"Émilie stayed with her mother. I need not say that her husband's confidence made her a sacred object in my eyes; and that although I loved her more than

a brother ought, I never looked upon her in any other light than as a sister.

"Six months passed. Émilie was living with her mother; and her husband, when he went away, had made her promise to continue to give receptions. My poor friend feared nothing so much as the reputation of a jealous man. The fact is that he adored Émilie, and had perfect confidence in her.

"So Émilie continued to receive her friends. Her receptions were confined to her intimate circle, and her mother's presence took away every possible pretext for slander from the most evil-tongued. So no one ever whispered a word implying a doubt of her fair fame.

"About three months ago M. de Château-Renaud obtained an introduction to her.

"You believe in presentiments, do you not? At sight of him, I shuddered. He didn't say a word to me, and his behavior was, in every respect, that of a well-bred man of the world; and yet, when he took his leave, I had already begun to hate him.

"Why was it? I haven't the slightest idea. I might, perhaps, say that it was because I perceived that he had the same feeling I had had when I first saw Émilie.

"It seemed to me that Émilie's manner was unusually coquettish when she received him. I was wrong, no doubt; but, as I told you, I had not ceased to love Émilie, and I was jealous.

"As a consequence, at the next *soirée* I didn't let M. de Château-Renaud out of my sight. Perhaps he noticed how persistently I kept my eyes on him; for I fancied that while he was talking with Émilie in an undertone, he was trying to make himself amusing at my expense.

"If I had listened to nothing but the voice of my heart, I would have sought a quarrel with him that very evening on some pretext or other, and measured swords with him; but I held myself back, arguing with myself over and over again that such conduct would be absurd.

"What would you! Thereafter, every Friday was a day of torment to me. M. de Château-Renaud is a typical man of the world, — a dandy, a lion in society. I recognized his superiority to me, in many respects; but it seemed to me that Émilie put him on a higher plane than he deserved.

"Soon I thought I could see that I was not alone in my observation of her preference for M. de Château-Renaud, and it became so much more marked and so patent that one day Giordano, who was an habitué of the house, like myself, spoke to me about it.

"From that moment my mind was made up. I resolved to speak to Émilie, convinced as I was that her conduct was due to nothing more than heedlessness on her part, and that I had only to open her eyes to induce her to put an end to everything which had afforded an excuse for the slightest whisper of impropriety.

"But to my great astonishment, Émilie took my remarks as a joke, pretending that I was mad, and that those who agreed with me were as mad as I.

"I insisted, and Émilie retorted that she did not trust my opinion in such a matter, for a man in love was prejudiced.

"I was struck dumb. Her husband had told her everything.

"Thenceforth, as you can see, my rôle became a ridiculous and hateful one, being looked upon as the jealous victim of an unrequited passion. I ceased to go to Émilie's house.

"Although I no longer attended her receptions, I continued to hear about her. I still knew what she was doing, and my unhappiness did not decrease; for M. de Château-Renaud's assiduous attentions to Émilie began to be a matter of common notoriety and gossip.

"I resolved to write to her; and did so with as much moderation as I could manage, begging her in the name of her endangered reputation, and her absent, trusting husband, to be very careful how she acted. She took no notice of my letter.

"What would you have! Love acts independently of the will. The poor creature loved; and loving, was blinded by her love, or preferred to be so blinded.

"Some time after this I heard it said openly that Émilie was M. de Château-Renaud's mistress. My suffering then was beyond all power of description, and that was the time that my poor brother felt the rebound of my grief.

"A fortnight or so passed, and then you came upon the scene. The very day that you called upon me, I received an anonymous letter from some woman, making an appointment with me at the *bal de l'Opéra*.

"The writer said that she had certain things to tell me concerning a lady of my acquaintance, whose Christian name only she would give me. That name was 'Émilie.' I was to recognize her by her bouquet of violets.

"I told you at the time that it would be much better for me not to go to the ball; but, I say again, I was driven there by fate.

"I went, and I met my domino at the time and place appointed. She confirmed what I had already heard,—that M. de Château-Renaud was Émilie's lover. And as I doubted, or pretended to doubt, she told me, as a

proof of what she advanced, that M. de Château-Renaud had made a bet that he would take his new mistress to supper at M. D——'s.

"As luck would have it, you knew M. D——, and were invited to the supper, with the privilege of taking a friend. You suggested taking me, and I accepted.

"You know the rest. Now, what is there for me to do, except to wait and accept such propositions as are made to me?"

There was nothing to be said, so I simply bent my head.

"But look here," I said, in a moment, with considerable apprehension, "I think I remember, but I trust I am wrong, that your brother told me you had never touched a pistol or a sword."

"It's true."

"Why, then, you are at your opponent's mercy!"

"What would you have! God will provide!"

CHAPTER XV.

At this moment the *valet-de-chambre* announced Baron Giordano Martelli.

He was, like De Franchi, a young Corsican from the province of Sartène. He had seen service in the Eleventh regiment, where one or two notable exploits had led to his receiving a captain's commission at twenty-three. It goes without saying that he was in civilian's clothes.

"Well," said he, after we had shaken hands, "matters seem to have progressed; and judging from your note, you will probably have a call from M. de Château-Renaud's seconds in the course of the day."

"I have had it already," said Louis.

"Did they leave their names and addresses?"

"Here are their cards."

"Good! Your valet told me that breakfast was served. Let us breakfast, and then we will return their call."

We went into the dining-room, and nothing more was said about the affair which brought us together.

Not till then did Louis question me about my trip to Corsica, and give me an opportunity to tell him all that the reader knows already. Now that the young man's mind was made easy by the thought that he was to fight M. de Château-Renaud the next day, his heart was once more filled with his love for his country and his family.

He made me repeat everything that his mother and brother said, twenty times over. He was especially

moved, knowing Lucien's true Corsican ideas, by the pains he had taken to put an end to the Colona-Orlandi feud.

The clock struck twelve.

"I think, without wishing to hurry you in the least, gentlemen, that it's about time to call upon our friends. If you delay any longer, they may think that we are negligent."

"Oh, as to that, don't disturb yourself," I replied. "It's hardly two hours since they were here, and they must give you time to notify us."

"Never mind," said Giordano, "Louis is right."

"Now," said I to Louis, "we must know which weapon you prefer,—sword or pistol?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* As I told you, it's all one to me, as I am not familiar with either. Anyway, M. de Château-Renaud will spare me the embarrassment of choosing. He will look upon himself as the insulted party, and, by virtue of that, will take whichever weapon suits him best."

"It's by no means certain that he is the insulted party. You did nothing but offer the arm which you were asked to offer."

"Listen," said Louis. "In my opinion, any discussion may be construed as coming from a desire to adjust the affair. My inclinations are very peaceful, as you know. I am very far from being a duellist, since this is my first affair; but those are the very considerations which make me wish to show myself a good hand at the sport."

"That's very easy for you to say, my dear boy. You are only playing for your life; but you are leaving us to take the responsibility for what may happen, and account to your family for it."

"Oh, as to that, have no fear. I know my mother and my brother. They will ask you, 'Did Louis bear himself gallantly?' And when you answer, 'Yes,' they will say, 'It is well.'"

"But come, deuce take it! we must know which weapon you prefer."

"Very well; if the pistol is proposed, accept it at once."

"That was my idea, too," said the baron.

"Pistol let it be, then," said I, "if you both think so. But the pistol is a wretched weapon."

"Have I time to learn to fence before to-morrow?"

"No. I don't know, though. With one good lesson from Gresier, you might learn how to defend yourself."

Louis smiled.

"Take my word for it," he said, "whatever is going to happen to me to-morrow is already written on high; and whatever you and I might do, we could not change it one jot."

With that, we shook hands and left him.

Our first call was naturally paid to that one of our adversary's seconds whose abode was nearest at hand, so we directed our steps to Rue de la Paix, No. 12, where M. René de Châteaugrand was to be found.

The door was closed to all except those who should come from M. Louis de Franchi. We stated our errand, and tendered our cards, and were immediately admitted.

We found M. de Châteaugrand an ultra-fashionable man of the world. He would not hear of our taking the trouble to go to M. de Boissy, but told us that they had agreed that the one on whom we called first should send for the other.

He therefore sent his servant to tell M. Adrien de Boissy that we were awaiting his coming.

While we were waiting, we did not mention the affair which took us there. We discussed the races, hunting, and the opera.

In about ten minutes M. de Boissy arrived.

These gentlemen put forward no claim that they were entitled to choose the weapons to be used. Sword and pistol being equally familiar to M. de Château-Renaud, the choice was left to M. de Franchi, or to chance. We tossed a louis in the air, — heads for swords, tails for pistols. It came down with the tail uppermost.

We then agreed that the fight should take place the next morning, at nine, in the wood of Vincennes; that the principals should stand twenty paces apart; that some one should clap his hands three times, and they should fire at the third stroke.

We went back to report to De Franchi.

That same evening I found M. de Châteaugrand's and M. de Boissy's cards when I reached home.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT eight o'clock in the evening, I went to see M. de Franchi, to inquire if he had no commission to intrust to me; but he requested me to wait till the next morning, saying, with a strange expression,—

“The night brings counsel.”

The next morning, therefore, instead of calling for him at eight, which would give us ample time to reach the rendezvous at nine, I was with him at half after seven.

He was already in his study, writing; and when I opened the door, he turned his face toward me. He was deathly pale.

“Excuse me,” he said, “while I finish a letter to my mother. Be seated, and take a paper, if they have come. See, there’s the ‘Presse,’ for instance. There’s a charming *feuilleton* by M. Méry.”

I took the paper he mentioned and sat down, marvelling much at the contrast between his colorless face and his sweet, tranquil, grave voice.

I tried to read, but my eyes wandered aimlessly over the words without giving me the least idea what they were.

“There, I have finished,” he said, after five minutes; and he immediately rang for his valet.

“Joseph, I am at home to no one, not even Giordano. Show him into the salon if he comes. I wish to be alone with Monsieur for ten minutes, and absolutely uninterrupted.”

The valet closed the door.

"You see, my dear Alexandre, Giordano is a Corsican, and has the ideas of a Corsican, so I cannot confide my wishes to him. I shall ask him to keep the affair secret, and that's all; while you must promise to fulfil my instructions from point to point."

"Of course! Is n't that the duty of a second?"

"It's a duty which is the more imperative because you may thus spare our family a second bereavement."

"A second bereavement?" I repeated.

"See what I have written my mother," he said.
"Read this letter."

I took it from his hands and read it, with increasing wonder:—

MY DEAR MOTHER,—If I did not know that you have the courage of a Spartan, and the resignation of a Christian to the will of God, I should use all possible means to prepare you for the frightful blow which is about to fall upon you. When you receive this letter, you will have but one son.

Lucien, my good brother, you must love our mother for both of us.

Day before yesterday I was stricken with brain fever, but paid little attention to the first symptoms; the doctor arrived too late. My darling mother, there is no hope for me, except a miracle be performed, and what right have I to hope that God will perform this miracle for me?

I am writing in a lucid interval; if I die, this letter will be mailed a quarter of an hour after my death, for in the selfishness of my love for you, I want you to know that I die, regretting nothing in the whole world except your love and my brother's.

Adieu, mother. Do not weep. It was my soul that loved you, not my body; and wherever it may go, my soul will never cease to love you.

Adieu, Lucien; never leave our mother, and remember that she has only you.

Your son and your brother,

LOUIS DE FRANCHI.

When I had read the last words, I turned to him who wrote them.

"Well," said I, "what does this mean?"

"Don't you understand?" he asked.

"No."

"I am going to be killed at ten minutes past nine."

"You are going to be killed?"

"Yes."

"Why, man, you're mad! Why do you talk like that?"

"I am not mad, my dear friend. I have been warned, that's all."

"Warned? By whom?"

"Didn't my brother tell you," Louis asked with a pathetic smile, "that the male members of our family possess a singular privilege?"

"Yes," I replied, shuddering involuntarily; "he spoke to me of ghosts."

"That's it. Well, my father appeared to me last night. That's why you found me so pale; the sight of the dead drives the blood from the cheeks of the living."

I looked at him with astonishment, not unmixed with terror.

"You saw your father last night, you say?"

"Yes."

"And he spoke to you?"

"He told me of my approaching death."

"It was some fearful dream," I said.

"It was a fearful reality."

"Were you asleep?"

"I was awake. Pray, don't you believe a father can visit his son?"

I hung my head, for in the depths of my heart I did believe it was possible.

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* as simply as possible, and as naturally. I was reading, waiting for my father; for I knew that if I were in danger of losing my life, he would come. At midnight my lamp grew dim of itself, the door opened slowly, and my father appeared."

"But in what shape?"

"Why, just as he was in his lifetime. He wore the coat he used to wear regularly; but he was very pale, and his eyes seemed to see nothing."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

"He slowly approached my bed. I raised myself on my elbow.

"'Welcome, father,' I said.

"He approached me, looked fixedly at me, and it seemed as if his glassy eye was lighted up by the strength of his paternal love."

"Go on; it's terrible!"

"Then his lips moved, and, strange to say, although no sound issued from them, I heard his words echoing within my body, perfectly distinct."

"What did he say?"

"He said,—

"'Think of God, my son!'

"'Shall I fall in this duel, then?' I asked.

"I saw two tears roll from the spectre's sightless eyes down his colorless cheeks.

"'And at what hour?'

"He pointed at the clock. I followed the direction of his finger, and saw that it was ten minutes past nine.

"'It is well, father,' I then said. 'God's will be done. I must leave my mother, it's true, but to be united to you.'

"Thereupon a wan smile passed over his lips, and he

vanished, after bidding me adieu with a motion of his hand.

"The door opened for him of itself, and closed behind him."

This whole tale was told so simply and naturally that it was perfectly clear, either that the events he described had actually taken place, or that, intensely absorbed in his anticipation of the ghostly visit, he had been the plaything of a hallucination which he had mistaken for reality, and which was consequently no less terrible.

I wiped the perspiration from my brow.

"Now," Louis continued, "you know my brother, don't you?"

"Yes."

"What do you suppose he would do, if he should learn that I had been killed in a duel?"

"He would start from Sullacaro on the instant, to come here and fight the man who killed you."

"Exactly; and then he would be killed, too, and my mother would be thrice a widow, having lost her husband and both her sons."

"Yes, I see; it's horrible to think of."

"Therefore it must be avoided. That's why I wrote this letter. If he believes that I died of brain fever, my brother will have no feeling against any one, and my mother will be comforted more readily, believing me to have been stricken by God's will, than if she knew I had been struck down by the hand of man. Unless —"

"Unless what?" I asked.

"Oh, no," continued Louis, "I trust that will not happen."

I saw that his new thought referred to some matter personal to himself, so I asked no questions.

The door was opened part way just at this moment.

"My dear De Franchi," said Baron de Giordano, "I respected your orders as long as I could; but it's eight o'clock, and the appointment is at nine. We have a league and a half to go, and we must be off."

"I am ready, my dear fellow," said Louis. "Pray come in; I have said all I had to say to Monsieur."

He placed his finger on his lips as he glanced at me.

"As for you, my friend," he continued, turning to the table and taking up a sealed letter, "this is for you. If anything happens to me, read this letter, and govern yourself accordingly, I beg you."

"Rely upon me."

"Have you got the weapons?"

"Yes," I replied. "But just as I left home, I noticed that one of the triggers worked badly. We will get a case of pistols at Devisme's, as we pass."

Louis smiled at me, and pressed my hand warmly. He understood that I did not want him to be shot with my pistols.

"Have you a carriage," he asked, "or shall Joseph go and find one?"

"I have my coupé," said the baron; "and if we sit close, it will hold three. Besides, we are a little late, and we can go more quickly with my horses than in a hired carriage."

"Let us go," said Louis.

We went down-stairs and found Joseph waiting at the door.

"Shall I go with Monsieur?" he asked.

"No, Joseph," replied Louis; "no, it's useless. I have no need of you."

He fell back a little.

"Here, my friend," said he, putting a little roll of

gold in his hand, "take this; and if I have been sharp with you sometimes in my moments of ill-humor, pray forgive me."

"Oh, monsieur," cried Joseph, with tears in his eyes, "what does this mean?"

"Hush!" said Louis, as he jumped into the carriage and took his place between us.

"He was a good servant," said he, looking back at Joseph, "and if either of you can do him a good turn, I shall be very grateful."

"Are you sending him away?" queried the baron.

"No, I am leaving him, that's all," said Louis, smiling.

We stopped at Devisme's door just long enough to get a case of pistols and powder and bullets: then we started off again at a fast trot.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE reached Vincennes at five minutes to nine.

Another carriage, M. de Château-Renaud's, arrived at almost the same moment.

We drove into the wood by different roads, our coachmen being instructed to meet in the main avenue; and in a few moments we were all at the place appointed.

"Messieurs," said Louis, stepping to the ground first, "no adjustment is possible, you understand."

"However —" I began, stepping to his side.

"Oh, my dear friend, just consider that, after my disclosures to you, you have less right than any one to suggest or listen to such a thing."

I bent before that determined will, which was supreme to me.

We left Louis by the carriage, and walked forward to meet M. de Boissy and M. de Châteaugrand, Baron de Giordano holding the case of pistols in his hand.

We exchanged salutations.

"Messieurs," said Giordano, "on such occasions as the present, the less time wasted in compliments the better, for we may be interrupted at any moment. We undertook to provide the weapons, and here they are; be good enough to examine them. We have just this moment procured them, and we give you our word that M. Louis de Franchi has never seen them."

"Your word is not necessary, monsieur," replied the Vicomte de Châteaugrand; "we know whom we are dealing with."

He took one pistol, and M. de Boissy the other, and they tried the springs, and inspected them generally.

"They are pistols of medium calibre, and have never been used," said the baron. "Now, are our principals to be at liberty to use the double trigger, or not?"

"It seems to me," said M. de Boissy, "that each one should do as best suits him, and as he is accustomed to do."

"Very well," said Giordano. "All equal chances we are willing to take."

"Then will you so inform M. de Franchi? and we will inform M. de Château-Renaud."

"Agreed. Now, monsieur, we furnished the weapons, and it is for you to load them."

Each of the young men took a pistol, carefully weighing out two equal charges of powder, took two bullets at hazard, and rammed them home.

During this operation, in which I preferred to take no part, I went back to Louis, who received me with a smile on his lips.

"You won't forget anything I asked you to do;" said he, "and you will make Giordano, of whom I have made the request in the letter I handed him, promise not to tell my mother or brother anything about the affair. Be kind enough also to see that the newspapers don't get hold of it, or that, if they do, they leave the names out."

"Then you still have that awful conviction that this duel will be fatal to you?" I asked.

"My conviction is stronger than ever; but you will do me the justice to agree, will you not, that I have watched the approach of death like a true Corsican?"

"Your tranquillity, my dear De Franchi, is so perfect that it makes me hope that you are not really convinced yourself."

Louis took out his watch.

"I have still seven minutes to live," said he. "Look, here's my watch; keep it, I beg, as a remembrance of me. It's an excellent Bréguet."

I took the watch, and pressed De Franchi's hand.

"In eight minutes," said I, "I hope to return it to you."

"Let's say no more about it," said he; "the others are coming this way."

"Messieurs," said the Vicomte de Châteaugrand, "there should be a clearing off here to the right, where I had an experience of this sort on my own account last year. Shall we try and find it? It would be a better place than this avenue, where we may be seen and interrupted."

"Lead the way, monsieur," said Giordano; "we will follow you."

The vicomte went ahead, and we followed him in two groups. After we had gone some thirty paces down an almost imperceptible incline, we found ourselves in an open space, which had undoubtedly been at some time a lake like that at Auteuil. It had quite dried up, and formed a sort of bog, surrounded on all four sides by a gentle slope. The spot seemed to have been made expressly to serve as a stage for such scenes as that about to be performed there.

"Monsieur Martelli," said the vicomte, "will you measure off the ground with me?"

The baron assented, and he and M. de Châteaugrand took twenty steps of ordinary length, walking side by side. Thus I was left again for a few seconds alone with M. de Franchi.

"By the way," said he, "you will find my will on the table at which I was writing when you entered."

"All right," said I, "I'll attend to it."

"Messieurs, when you are ready,— " said the Vicomte de Châteaugrand.

"Here I am," said Louis. "Adieu, my dear friend! Thank you for all the trouble you have taken for me,— to say nothing," he added with a melancholy smile, "of all that you are still to take."

I took his hand; it was cold, but firm and steady.

"Come," said I, "forget all about the apparition of last night, and take as careful aim as you can."

"Do you remember 'Freischutz'?"

"Yes."

"Well, every ball has its allotted destination, you know. Adieu."

He walked forward toward Giordano, who held in his hand the pistol he was to use. Louis took it, and cocked it without so much as glancing at it, and took his place, which was marked by a handkerchief.

M. de Château-Renaud was already standing at the place marked out for him.

There was an instant of deathlike stillness, while the young men saluted their own seconds, then those of their opponent, and lastly one another.

M. de Château-Renaud had the air of being well used to such affairs, and was smiling, as if he were sure of his aim. Perhaps he knew, too, that it was the first time Louis de Franchi had ever touched a pistol.

Louis was calm and collected; his beautiful head seemed as if cut out of marble.

"Well, messieurs," said Château-Renaud, "we are waiting, as you see."

Louis cast a last glance at me; then, with a smile, raised his eyes to heaven.

"Ready, messieurs," said Châteaugrand.

Then, striking his hands against one another, he exclaimed,—

"Once — twice — thrice!"

The two shots made but a single report.

My eyes were riveted upon De Franchi, and I saw him turn around twice, then sink down upon his knees.

M. de Château-Renaud had not moved; the ball had pierced the skirt of his coat.

I rushed up to Louis de Franchi.

"Are you wounded?" I cried.

He tried to reply, but could not; there was a bloody froth upon his lips. He let his pistol fall, and put his hand to his right side. I could just see a hole, smaller than the end of my little finger, in his coat.

"Monsieur le Baron," I cried, "run to the barracks, and bring the regimental surgeon."

But De Franchi pulled himself together, and made a sign with his head to Giordano that it was useless.

M. de Château-Renaud left the spot precipitately, but his two seconds drew near the wounded man.

Meanwhile we had unbuttoned his coat, and torn away the waistcoat and shirt. The bullet had entered below the sixth rib on the right side, and had come out just above the left hip. With every breath that he drew, the blood gushed from both apertures. It was evident that the wound was mortal.

"Monsieur de Franchi," said the Vicomte de Château-grand, "we are pained beyond expression, we assure you, at such an ending of this unfortunate affair; and we hope that you bear no ill-will to M. de Château-Renaud."

"No, no," muttered the wounded man, — "no, I forgive him; but let him go away — let him go away —"

Then he turned to me, with a painful effort. "Remember your promise," said he.

"Oh, I give you my word of honor that it shall be done as you desire."

"And now," said he, smiling, "look at the watch."

With that he fell back, with a long-drawn sigh. It was the last.

I looked at the watch, and it was exactly ten minutes past nine. Then I looked again at Louis de Franchi. He was dead.

We carried the body to his apartments; and while the Baron de Giordano went to report his death to the police commissary of the quarter, I went up to his bed-room with Joseph.

The poor fellow was weeping bitterly.

As we entered, my eyes instinctively glanced at the clock. It said ten minutes past nine. Probably he had forgotten to wind it up, and it had stopped at that hour.

A moment later Giordano came in with the officers, who put seals upon everything.

The baron proposed to write to the friends and acquaintances of the deceased, telling them what had happened; but I begged him first to read the letter Louis handed him when we left the house.

That letter contained an earnest entreaty to him to conceal the cause of his death from Lucien, and requested that the interment might take place quietly and without any parade, so that no one need know anything about it.

The baron took charge of all the preparations, while I went at once to call upon M. de Boissy and M. de Châteaugrand, to request them to keep quiet about the wretched affair, and to urge them to prevail upon M. de Château-Renaud to leave Paris for some time at least, without telling him the reason for their urgency.

They promised to do all they possibly could to carry out my wishes; and while they went in search of M. de Château-Renaud, I deposited in the post the letter informing Madame de Franchi that her son had died of brain fever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THIS duel created no talk at all,—a thing which can seldom be said of such affairs. Even the newspapers—those noisy and misleading trumpeters of public opinion—had nothing to say.

None but a few intimate friends accompanied the body of the unfortunate youth to Père la Chaise.

But despite all the appeals that were made to him, M. de Château-Renaud refused to leave Paris.

I had for a moment the idea of following up Louis's letter to his family with one from myself; but although it would have been for a most excellent purpose, the thought of lying about the death of a son and brother was repugnant to me. I knew that Louis himself must have fought a long while against doing such a thing, and that he could never have made up his mind to do it for reasons of less weight than those he gave me.

Therefore I kept silence, at the risk of being accused of indifference or ingratitude; and I felt sure that Giordano had done the same.

Five days after the event, about eleven at night, I was sitting at my table working, and with a decidedly blue fit upon me, when my servant entered, closed the door nervously, and informed me, in an agitated voice, that M. de Franchi wished to see me.

I turned, and stared at him. He was very pale.

"What's that, Victor?" I asked.

"Oh, monsieur," he cried, "really, I don't know myself!"

"What M. de Franchi are you talking about? Come, explain yourself!"

"Why, monsieur's friend,—the gentleman I have seen here once or twice —"

"You are mad, my boy! Don't you know that we were unfortunate enough to lose him five days ago?"

"Yes, monsieur; and that's just why I am so worked up. He rang. I was in the anteroom, and I opened the door. When I saw him, I started back.

"Then he came in, and asked if Monsieur was at home. I was so excited that I said 'Yes.' Then he said, 'Go and tell him that M. de Franchi wishes to speak with him;' and I came."

"You are mad, I tell you! The anteroom was dimly lighted, no doubt, and you did n't see straight. You were still asleep, and heard wrong. Go back and ask for his name again."

"Oh, it's no use. I swear to you, monsieur, that I am not mistaken. I saw and heard right."

"Then show him in."

Victor went back to the door, trembling like a leaf, and opened it, but remained in my room.

"Will Monsieur please come in?" he called.

Thereupon I heard steps crossing the salon and approaching my room; and almost immediately M. de Franchi actually appeared at my door.

I confess that my first feeling was one of terror, pure and simple. I rose from my chair, and took a step backward.

"Excuse me for disturbing you at such an hour," said he, "but I only arrived in Paris ten minutes ago; and you can understand that I could n't wait till to-morrow to come and talk with you."

"Oh, my dear Lucien," I cried, rushing up to him,

and taking him in my arms, "is it you? Is it really you?"

Tears came to my eyes, in spite of myself.

"Yes," said he, "it's I."

I reckoned up the time that had elapsed. The letter could hardly have reached Ajaccio, not to say, Sullacaro.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" I cried, "then you know nothing?"

"I know everything."

"What! Everything?"

"Yes."

"Victor," said I to my valet, who was not yet easy in his mind, "leave us. Come back in quarter of an hour with something to eat. You will take supper with me, Lucien, and sleep here, will you not?"

"Gladly. I have eaten nothing since leaving Auxerre. As no one knew me, — or rather," he added, with a smile of the utmost sadness, "as every one seemed to recognize me as my poor brother, — at his rooms, they refused to let me in; so I came away, leaving the whole household up in arms."

"Indeed, my dear Lucien, your resemblance to Louis is so extraordinary that I was struck with it myself a moment ago."

"What!" cried Victor, who had not yet succeeded in making up his mind to leave the room. "Then Monsieur is the brother of —"

"Yes. But go, and get us some supper."

Victor went out, and left us alone.

I took Lucien by the hand, led him to a chair, and sat down beside him.

"Why, you must have been on your way to Paris when you heard the fatal news," I said, wondering more and more at his unexpected appearance.

"No, I was at Sullacaro."

"Impossible! Your brother's letter has hardly got there yet."

"You have forgotten the ballad of Bürger, dear Alexandre. The dead travel quickly."

I shuddered.

"What do you mean? For God's sake, explain yourself. I don't understand."

"Do you forget what I told you about the familiar spirits of our family?"

"You have seen your brother?" I cried.

"Yes."

"When was it?"

"During the night of the 16th and 17th."

"And he told you everything?"

"Everything."

"He told you that he was dead?"

"He told me that he had been killed. The dead never lie."

"Did he tell you how?"

"In a duel."

"By whom?"

"By M. de Château-Renaud."

"No, no," I said. "You learned it in some other way, didn't you?"

"Do you think I am in a mood to joke?"

"Forgive me. But, in truth, this that you tell me is so strange, and everything that happens to you and your brother is so contrary to all the accepted laws of Nature —"

"That you don't wish to believe it, you would say? I understand. But look at this," he continued, opening his shirt and showing me a blue mark on the skin below the sixth rib on the right side. "Do you believe this?"

"Upon my soul!" I cried; "that's the exact spot where your brother was wounded."

"And the ball came out here, didn't it?" he continued, placing his finger above the left hip.

"It's miraculous!" I exclaimed.

"And now," he continued, "would you like me to tell you at what time he died?"

"Tell me!"

"At ten minutes past nine."

"Come, Lucien, tell me the whole story connectedly. My mind will leave me, if I continue to ask questions and listen to your weird answers. I prefer a connected story."

CHAPTER XIX.

LUCIEN rested his elbow on the arm of his chair, fixed his eyes on my face, and went on, as follows:—

“Oh, *mon Dieu!* it’s very simple. The day that my brother was killed, I had ridden out early in the morning to visit our shepherds in the direction of Carboni. I was just putting my watch back in my fob, after looking to see what time it was, when I received so violent a blow in the side that I fainted. When I came to myself, I was lying on the ground, with my head supported by Orlandi, who was throwing water in my face. My horse was four or five paces away, stretching his head out toward me, sniffing and snorting.

“‘Well,’ said Orlandi, ‘what happened to you, in God’s name?’

“‘*Mon Dieu!*’ I replied, ‘I’ve no idea. Didn’t you hear a shot?’

“‘No.’

“‘I think a bullet struck me here,’ said I, pointing to the spot where I had felt the blow.

“‘In the first place,’ said he, ‘there’s been no gun or pistol fired about here; and in the second place, there’s no hole in your coat.’

“‘Then,’ I replied, ‘it must be that my brother has been killed.’

“‘Ah, that’s a different matter,’ said he.

“I opened my coat, and found the mark I just showed you; but at that time it was inflamed, and blood-red.

"For a moment I was tempted, so used up was I by the mental and physical pain I was suffering, to return to Sullacaro; but I thought of my mother, — she didn't expect me till supper-time. I should have to give her some explanation of my return, and I had none to give; for I didn't want to tell her my brother was dead until I was perfectly sure of it. So I kept on, and didn't go home till six at night.

"My poor mother received me as usual. It was evident that she had no suspicion.

"Immediately after supper, I went up to my room; and as I was passing through the corridor, — you remember it? — the wind blew out my candle. I started to go down again to re-light it, when I saw, through the crack in the door, that there was a light in my brother's room.

"I supposed Griffo had had something to look after there, and had forgotten to take away his lamp. I pushed against the door. A taper was burning by the side of my brother's bed, and on that bed my brother was lying, naked and bleeding.

"I stood for an instant, I confess, transfixed with terror. Then I approached him.

"I touched him; he was already cold.

"His body was pierced by a bullet, at the very spot where I had felt the blow, and blood was still dripping from the wound.

"It was clear to me, of course, that my brother had been killed.

"I fell on my knees, and laying my head against the bed, fell to praying, with my eyes closed.

"When I re-opened them, I was in utter darkness. The taper had gone out; the vision had faded away.

"I felt the bed. It was empty.

"Upon my soul, I believe myself to be as courageous as another; but when I went out of that room, feeling my way in the darkness, my hair was standing on end and the sweat was pouring off my forehead.

"I went down to get another candle. My mother saw me, and cried out, —

" 'What's the matter, in Heaven's name?' she said. 'Why are you so pale?'

" 'There's nothing the matter,' I replied; and I took another candlestick, and went upstairs again.

"This time the candle didn't go out, and I went back into my brother's room. It was empty. The taper had vanished utterly, and there was no sign that any heavy body had lain upon the mattress.

"On the floor was my first candle, which I re-lighted.

"Notwithstanding the lack of additional proof, I had seen enough to be convinced. At ten minutes past nine in the morning, my brother had been shot. I went to my own room, and got into bed, in a state of intense excitement.

"As you may imagine, it took me a long while to go to sleep; but at last weariness got the better of excitement, and sleep took possession of me.

"Then everything was disclosed to me in the shape of a dream. I saw the whole scene, just as it was enacted. I saw the man who killed him, and heard his name. It was M. de Château-Renaud."

"Alas! this is all only too true," I rejoined. "But why have you come to Paris?"

"To kill the man who killed my brother."

"To kill him?"

"Oh, don't be alarmed. Not in Corsican fashion, — from behind a fence or over a wall; no, no, in true French style, with white gloves, a ruffle, and lace wristbands."

"Does Madame de Franchi know that you have come to Paris on such an errand?"

"Yes."

"And she allowed you to come?"

"She kissed me on the brow, and said, 'Go!' My mother is a true Corsican."

"And so you have come?"

"I am here."

"But your brother, when he was living, did not want to be avenged."

"Oh, well," said Lucien, with a bitter smile, "he changed his mind after he died."

At this moment the valet entered with the supper, and we sat down at the table.

Lucien ate like a man with nothing on his mind.

After supper I showed him to his room. He thanked me, pressed my hand, and bade me good-night. It was the tranquillity which every resolute heart feels after the mind is irrevocably made up.

The next morning he came to my room the moment my servant told him that I was ready to receive him.

"Will you go to Vincennes with me?" said he. "It is a pious pilgrimage which I must make. If you have n't the time, I will go alone."

"Alone? Who will show you the place?"

"Oh, I shall know it again. Did n't I tell you that I saw it in my dream?"

I was curious to know how far this extraordinary intuition would go.

"I shall be glad to go with you," I said.

"Well, suppose you get ready while I write to Giordano. You will allow me to send your valet to him with a letter, will you not?"

"He is at your service."

"Thanks."

He went out, and returned in ten minutes with the letter, which he handed to Victor.

I had sent, meanwhile, for a cabriolet. We entered it, and started for Vincennes.

"We are getting near the place, are n't we?" said Lucien, as we passed a cross-roads.

"Yes. Twenty paces away is the spot where we entered the wood."

"Here we are," said he, stopping the carriage. It was the exact spot.

Lucien entered the wood unhesitatingly, as if he had been there twenty times before. He went straight to the open space, and when he reached it, looked about for a second. Then, walking to the spot where his brother fell, he bent over, and descried a reddish mark on the ground.

"This is the place," he said.

He bent his head and kissed the soil; then rose, with flashing eye, and crossed the clearing to the place where M. de Château-Renaud stood.

"This is where he was," said he, stamping upon the ground, "and here you will see him lying dead to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" I said.

"Yes. Either he is a coward, or he will give me my revenge on this spot to-morrow."

"But, my dear Lucien, the rule in France, you know, is that a duel shall have no other consequences than those to which it naturally gives rise. M. de Château-Renaud fought with your brother, whom he had insulted; but there's nothing between you and him."

"Indeed! So M. de Château-Renaud had the right

to insult my brother because my brother offered his protection to a woman whom he had deceived like a base coward; and according to your theory, he had the right to do all this. M. de Château-Renaud killed my brother, who had never fired a pistol in his life. He killed him with as much immunity from danger as if he had been firing at that doe which is looking at us. And I, forsooth, have n't the right to insult M. de Château-Renaud, you say? Nonsense!"

I hung my head, without a word to say.

"Moreover," he continued, "you have no part in all this. Never fear. I wrote this morning to Giordano; and when we return, it will all be arranged. Do you suppose M. de Château-Renaud will refuse my proposition?"

"M. de Château-Renaud, unfortunately, has a reputation for courage which does not admit of the least doubt on that point, I confess."

"Then all is for the best," said Lucien. "Let us go to breakfast."

We returned to the avenue, and re-entered the cabriolet.

"Rue de Rivoli, driver," said I.

"No," said Lucien, "I am going to take you to breakfast with me. Café de Paris, driver. Isn't that where my brother generally dined?"

"I think so."

"I asked Giordano to meet me there, too."

"To the Café de Paris, then."

Half an hour later we were at the door of the restaurant.

CHAPTER XX.

LUCIEN's entrance evoked fresh proof of the striking resemblance between his dead brother and himself.

Louis's death had become generally known, — not, perhaps, in all its details, but still it was generally known, — and Lucien's appearance seemed to strike everybody dumb with amazement.

I asked for a private room, as the Baron de Giordano was to join us; we were furnished with one, and Lucien began to read the papers with a degree of *sang-froid* which much resembled lack of feeling.

While we were at breakfast, Giordano came in.

The young men had not met for four or five years, but a grasp of the hand was the only demonstration of friendship they indulged in.

"Well, everything is arranged," said the baron.

"M. de Château-Renaud accepts?"

"Yes, but on the condition that he shall be left in peace after he has given you satisfaction."

"Oh, he need have no fear on that score; I am the last of the De Franchi. Did you see him or his seconds?"

"I saw him personally. He undertook to notify M. de Boissy and M. de Châteaugrand. As to the weapons, and the time and place, they are the same."

"Splendid! Sit you down, and have some breakfast."

The baron complied, and we began to talk on other subjects.

After breakfast, Lucien requested us to make him known to the police official who had affixed the seals, and to the proprietor of the house where his brother

lived. He desired to pass the last night which separated him from his revenge, in Louis's own room.

All these transactions used up a large part of the day, and it was not until five at night that Lucien took up his quarters in his brother's apartments. We left him alone; true grief has a modesty of its own which should be respected.

He made an appointment with us for eight o'clock the next morning, begging me to try and procure the same pistols, and to buy them if they were for sale.

I went at once to Devisme's and bought them for six hundred francs. The next day, at quarter to eight, I was at Lucien's door.

When I entered, he was sitting in the same place and writing at the same table at which I had found his brother. He had a smile on his lips, although he was very pale.

"Good-morning," said he; "I am writing to my mother."

"I hope you are making a more cheerful announcement to her than your brother was occupied in doing, when I found him here a week ago this morning."

"I am saying to her that she can pray for her son with the assurance that he is avenged."

"How are you able to speak with such confidence?"

"Did not my brother tell you of his death before it happened? In like manner, I tell you beforehand that M. de Château-Renaud will die."

He rose, and touched me on the temple.

"Look," said he, "I will put my bullet there."

"And how about yourself?"

"He won't so much as touch me."

"At all events, wait until the duel is over before you send the letter."

"It's perfectly useless to do so."

He rang for his valet.

"Joseph," said he, "take this letter to the post."

"Why, have you seen your brother again?"

"Yes," he replied simply.

It was an extraordinary thing that these two duels should follow so closely upon one another, and that one of the two principals in each should be doomed in advance.

Meanwhile, Giordano arrived. It was eight o'clock, and we set out.

Lucien was in such haste to get to the spot, and urged the driver so persistently, that we arrived ten minutes before the hour.

Our adversaries appeared punctually at nine. They were all on horseback, and followed by a servant, also mounted.

M. de Château-Renaud had his hand thrust into his coat, and I thought at first that he was carrying his arm in a sling.

Twenty paces from us, they alighted, and threw their reins to the servant.

M. de Château-Renaud remained behind, but glanced at Lucien. Notwithstanding the distance between us, I could see him turn pale. He turned his back upon us then, and amused himself by cutting off the tops of the wild flowers with his riding-whip.

"Here we are, messieurs," said MM. de Châteaugrand and de Boissy. "You know our conditions, — that this duel is to be the last, and that whatever the result M. de Château-Renaud is not to be called upon to answer to anybody for the one or the other."

"It is so understood," Giordano and I replied, and Lucien bent his head in token of his assent.

"You have the weapons, messieurs?" asked Château-grand.

"The same ones."

"And they are unfamiliar to M. de Franchi?"

"He is much less familiar with them than is M. de Château-Renaud, who has already used them once. M. de Franchi has not yet seen them."

"Very well, messieurs. Come, Château-Renaud."

We at once entered the wood without a word; each one of us, hardly recovered from the effects of the tragedy which we had so recently witnessed on the same stage, felt that we were about to witness another no less terrible.

We reached the clearing.

M. de Château-Renaud, whose self-control was wonderful, was outwardly calm; but they who had seen him on both occasions could realize the difference in him.

From time to time he glanced covertly at Lucien, and his look expressed a degree of nervousness which resembled fear.

It may have been the striking resemblance between the two brothers which filled his thoughts; it may be that he imagined that he saw in Lucien, Louis's avenging spirit.

While the pistols were being loaded, I noticed that he took his hand out from his coat; it was wrapped in a wet handkerchief, presumably to quiet its nervous trembling.

Lucien was waiting with calm and placid eye, — the very type of a man sure of his revenge.

Without waiting to have his station pointed out to him, he placed himself just where his brother had stood, thereby, as it were, forcing M. de Château-Renaud to stand where he had stood on the previous occasion.

Lucien grasped his weapon with a joyous smile.

M. de Château-Renaud, when he received his, became absolutely livid. Then he put his hand between his collar and his neck, as if he were strangling.

It is impossible to form any idea of the involuntary feeling of terror which came over me, as I looked at that young man, handsome, rich, fashionably dressed, who believed, twenty-four hours before, that he had long years to live; and who now, with the dew of anguish on his brow, and terror in his heart, felt that his last hour had come.

"Are you ready, messieurs?" asked Châteaugrand.

"Yes," Lucien replied, while M. de Château-Renaud nodded affirmatively.

I confess that I shrank from looking on at what was to follow, and I turned away.

I heard two blows with the hand in quick succession, and with the third the reports of the two pistols.

I looked around.

M. de Château-Renaud was stretched on the ground, stark dead, without breath or motion.

I drew near the body, drawn by that invincible curiosity which leads us to follow a catastrophe, however horrible, to the end. The bullet had pierced his head at the exact spot Lucien had pointed out.

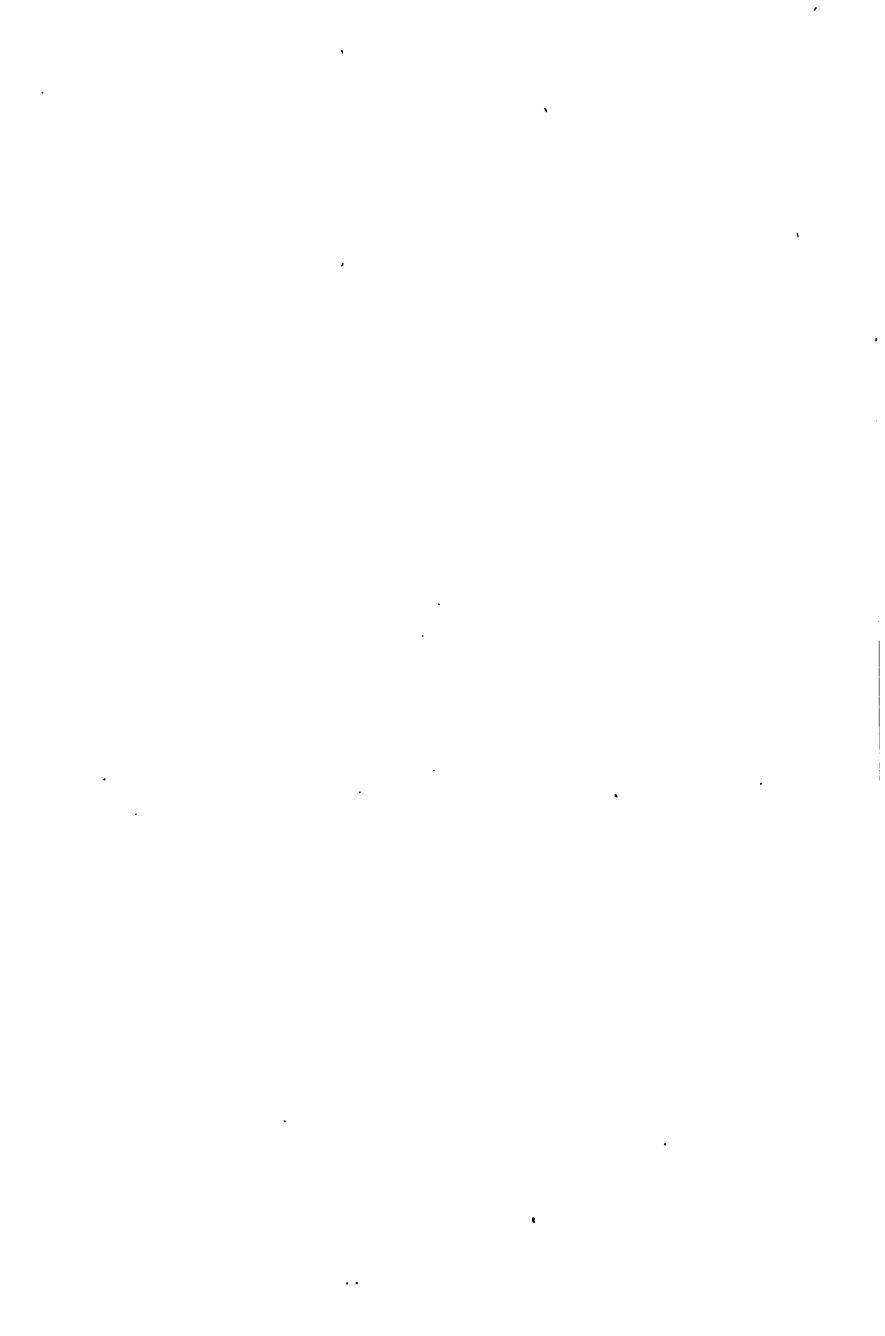
I ran up to him. He was as calm and unmoved as ever; but when he saw me at his side, he dropped his pistol, and threw himself into my arms.

"Oh, my brother! my poor brother!" he cried, sobbing as if his heart would break.

They were the first tears he had shed.

THE END.









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